

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/2/07 Labor Day Weekend at Porter Township Park
2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 "He is Coming Again!"¹

Jesus led His followers to a hillside outside of Jerusalem, told them to tell the world about Him, and then before their very eyes He was taken up beyond the clouds.

Two men dressed in white suddenly appeared, asked a question, and then revealed an amazing promise in Acts 1:11: "'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.'"

He's coming back! That means there's more to life than meets the eye. The grave is not the end. There's life beyond this life, eternal life. Jesus Christ *is* coming again. That fact is our certain hope.

What difference should Christ's coming make in our lives? We find the answer in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10. His coming gives us two very practical benefits.

I. The Second Coming gives us *help* for the present (5-7a).

What kind of present help? Paul says His coming ought to affect us in two ways.

A. It changes our view of suffering (5). The Thessalonian Christians knew all about suffering. That's why Paul (along with Silas and Timothy; 1:1) wrote this second epistle, some six months after his first letter, in the year A.D. 51 or 52. Like 1 Thessalonians, this letter deals extensively with eschatology, and as been observed, 18 out of 47 verses (38%) of 2 Thessalonians deals with this subject.²

A great by-product of studying the Second Coming is that it changes the way we view suffering. Listen to verse 5, "All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering." We can make a couple of deductions about suffering from this.

1. *Suffering is the norm.* Christians suffer. Do you realize that more Christians have been killed for Christ in the past century than in all the rest of church history combined? Even as we meet comfortably here, believers suffer for Christ in hostile lands. Does that mean God is on vacation? Does that mean those Christians are being punished, or that they lack faith? Hardly! It's evidence. Of what?

2. *Suffering is evidence that we belong to a different kingdom.* Verse 5 begins, "All this is evidence." The Thessalonian church faced hostility soon after its inception. Acts 17 tells us that after preaching for three weeks, a riot broke out, and Paul had to leave town under the cover of darkness. That was just the beginning. The young believers faced oppression and hardship, so severe that many thought they weren't going to make it.

But they hung in there, by the grace of God (as verse 4 indicates), so that Paul concluded, "All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God." We are so prone to believe that suffering proves that God doesn't care. Not so!

Beloved, faith in the midst of suffering was evidence that the Thessalonians belonged to a different kingdom. God's kingdom.

¹ Adapted from message preached at WBC 6/15/97

²NIV Study Bible, p. 1829.

Is there evidence that *you* belong to God's kingdom? If you are living for Christ, the world will not applaud. It will cost you something. Has it? Is there evidence that you have persevered for Christ? If there is, be encouraged! You belong to a kingdom, God's kingdom.

Suffering, then, is not the exception, but the norm. And endurance in suffering is evidence that God's kingdom power rests upon us.

"But wait," you say, "How can we endure suffering? What keeps us going when we feel like giving up?" The answer, as we'll see in verses 6-10, is the Second Coming! The Second Coming helps us in two practical ways, first in our view of suffering, and second...

B. It changes our view of living (6-7a). "God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well." When? "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels."

Knowing that Christ is coming again changes our perspective on living. No matter how bad things get in the present, we can be sure of two things, according to verses 6-7.

1. *God will repay trouble-makers with trouble.* God is just, the text says. He sees. He makes things right. When will He do it? At the revelation of Christ. Right here God tells us what He will do at the Second Coming. He will repay. He will make recompense. He will make things right with two groups.

First, He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you. Do Christians take it on the chin? Yes, they do. Does it sometimes seem like trouble-makers are getting away with their schemes? Yes, it does. But remember this. The final word isn't in yet.

R. C. Sproul makes this astute observation, "Man-centered humans are amazed that God should withhold life and joy from his creatures. But the God-centered Bible is amazed that God should withhold judgment from sinners."³

God will repay. The Day is coming when He will make things right. He will recompense trouble-makers with trouble. He will also settle the score with a second group, according to verse 7.

2. *God will repay the troubled with relief.* The verse division blurs Paul's point here. There are two direct objects connected to the infinitive "to recompense" (in the KJV): the first is "tribulation" (verse 6) and the second is "rest" (verse 7; "relief"). The first is what God will give to those who trouble Christians--*tribulation* (a taste of their own medicine). The second is what He will give to those who endured trouble--*rest*. "There remains, therefore, a *rest* to the people of God (Heb. 4:9)."

The word "rest" means "relief from tension." The Greeks used the term to describe taking the tension off of a taut bow string. In this life we feel pressure, but not for long.

It makes a big difference when you know relief is coming. Like when the dentist comes to you with needle in hand, and says, "Now this will hurt a little, but *not for long*." Or when the coach says, "I'm going to work you hard in practice today, but we'll go light tomorrow." It's motivating to know that after a couple of hours, the pain will be over. Relief is coming.

³in John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, p. 30.

The doctrine of the Second Coming says to us, "Take heart, Christian! Relief is coming!" Belief in the Second Coming gives us *help* as we face the pain of the present. The Second Coming produces a second very practical benefit.

II. The Second Coming gives us *hope* for the future (7b-10).

Church names often tell a lot about a church. Several years ago while on vacation, we looked in the yellow pages for churches in Statesville, NC, to find one to attend that Sunday. One church name caught my eye, "Gateway to Heaven Commandment Keeping Church." Not only was the name a mouthful, but it left no doubt as to what this group of people deemed important--focusing on heaven and how to get there.

I don't know anything else about that church (we worshiped at another church that day), but of this I'm sure. To be a church that honors God, to be Christians that honor God, we must give serious attention to the future *now*--namely, to the Second Coming. It is our *hope*! We learn three characteristics of this event in verses 7-10.

A. It will be a time of *revelation* (7b). We begin reading at the middle of verse 7, "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels." I do not believe that this is the same event described by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. In that text Paul says Christ will return in the air, not to the earth, and secretly for His Church. That event is known as the *rapture*. The event before us in 2 Thessalonians refers not to the rapture, but to the *revelation* of Christ--His Second Coming. His public, triumphant return to the earth.

The Greek term is *apokalupsis*, from which the term "apocalypse" is derived. It means to uncover, to unfold, to reveal. Here it speaks of the day when the Lord Jesus will be *revealed* to the world that once rejected Him. The day of His revelation is coming. That day will be characterized by three marks (as indicated by three participial phrases).

1. *It will be a supernatural day.* "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven." In that day, God will break into history. The supernatural will descend upon the natural. The Lord Jesus will leave His throne in heaven, not to enter the world as a babe in a manger, but in awesome display of His power.

2. *It will be a spectacular day.* "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in *blazing fire*." The AV places this phrase in verse 8, but it probably belongs in verse 7 (as in the NIV). Fire is a symbol of the divine presence in the Bible. When God gave the Law at Mount Sinai, there was fire. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, there were tongues of fire. When Jesus returns, He will be adorned by flaming fire.

In Revelation 1, John shares this picture of Jesus (12-14): "Among the golden lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like *blazing fire*." My friend, that will be a spectacular day!

3. *It will be a severe day.* "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire *with his powerful angels*." When Jesus came to the world the first time, only a small number of the world's population saw Him, and of those, only a very few gave Him respect. But when He comes a second time, no one will ignore Him. No one.

In that severe day, Jesus will be accompanied by His mighty angels. What will the angels do? Jesus Himself answered that question in Matthew 13:41-42. It will be the angels' task, first, to gather the weeds and bind them in bundles to be burned, and second, to gather the wheat into the Lord's barn. What does that mean? Paul explains for us in the next verses. There we learn that in addition to being a time of revelation...

B. It will be a time of *retribution* (8-9). Listen to what Jesus will do when He appears (8), "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." He will punish. He will take *vengeance*.

Please don't confuse *vengeance* with *revenge*. As Warren Wiersbe observes (194), "The purpose of vengeance is to satisfy God's holy law; the purpose of revenge is to pacify a personal grudge. God does not hold a grudge against lost sinners. Quite the contrary, He sent His Son to die for them, and He pleads with them to return to Him."

But in that day, He will not plead. He will judge.

Does that grip you, my friend? There is coming a time of retribution. Do you need a motivation to get involved in evangelism? Here it is! You and I have neighbors and family members and workmates and classmates who are facing eternal condemnation. We must plead with them. And if you're not a Christian, and you are waiting for a lightning bolt, a feeling that will prompt you to get right with God, look no further. Here it is!

Listen to what God's Word says will happen to you if you refuse to repent and obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus. Verse 9, "They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power." What kind of punishment awaits the ungodly? They will experience never-ending destruction characterized by two horrors. Here's what the Lord says He will do.

1. *He will cut off the ungodly from His presence.* Do you feel the weight of those words, "shut out from the presence of the Lord"? To be cut off from His presence speaks of isolation and loneliness to the nth degree. Do you feel lonely and isolated today? Many people do, and that's tragic, since Jesus offers life that is abundant. But even more tragic is the thought of eternal separation from God. But that will be the penalty that a holy God will pour out on those who do not know Him. A second horror...

2. *He will cut off the ungodly from His glory.* They will be shut out "from the majesty of His power" ("the glory of His power" KJV). To be cut off from God's presence speaks of loneliness and isolation. To be cut off from His glory speaks of futility and meaninglessness. Why? Because that is what we were created for--His glory.

Oh, what sadness! To be cut off, to spend eternity in frustration and futility, having rejected the purpose for which we were created--to bring glory to God--and to know you can't go back!

A story is told about two farmers (Wiersbe, 194), one a believer and the other an atheist. When the harvest season came, the atheist mocked his Christian neighbor because apparently God had not blessed him to much. On the other hand, the atheist's family was healthy, his crops vibrant, and a huge profit a guarantee.

The atheist jabbed, "I thought you said it paid to believe in God and be a Christian."

To which the Christian replied, "It does pay. But God doesn't always pay His people in September."

Have you come to grips with the Second Coming? It will be a time of revelation, when Jesus reveals Himself and every knee bows in His presence. It will also be a time of retribution, an unavoidable appointment between God and the ungodly. But for God's people, it will be different...

C. It will be a time of *reward* (10). "On the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you."

You say, "What will happen to us at the Second Coming? What will that Day hold for us?" First, let's define who "us" is. In verse 10, God describes His people as: "his saints (holy ones)" and "those who have believed." It's not those who have believed in just anything, either, but (as Paul puts it), those who have believed in "our testimony" to you. We're talking about people who have accepted the gospel message which the apostles preached, who have been declared holy because they have trusted in the work of Christ.

For that group, the Second Coming will be a time of reward. Here's what that day will hold for us who know Christ.

1. *We will glorify Him.* "When He shall come to be glorified in His saints." The verb is unusual here (used only here and in verse 12 in the NT). It indicates that Jesus will not only be glorified "among" us but "in" us. On that great day, not only will the Lord be glorious, but His glory will be seen in His saints. We will mirror His glory.

When you look in a mirror, what do you see? Yourself? Yes and no. You actually see a *reflection* of yourself. In that day it will be our privilege to reflect His glory! As 1 John 3:2 puts it, "When He shall appear, we shall be like Him."

2. *We will marvel at Him.* "On the day He comes...to be marveled at among all those who have believed." The word *marvel* means "to admire, to wonder." That Day will be a day of breath-taking wonder. It will be *His* day.

We often think, "That will be a great day because we'll get to see our loved ones who've gone before us." And so it will. We will *see* them, but we will *marvel* at Him! That will be *His* day! It will be our reward to glorify and marvel at Him!

Lots of people naively think they are in control. That's why they refuse to get saved. A person in control doesn't need to *get saved*. "Why should I? I'm in control!" He doesn't see his need for God. He fails to ponder who's really in control.

Sometimes God in His mercy sends a wake-up call to remind us we're not in control. A blown business venture. A hospital stay. A relationship that's gone sour. We're confronted with our mortality, and we begin to squirm.

Listen, my friend. The second coming of Christ will be the ultimate wake-up call. Jesus will have His day. That fact is our help for the present and hope for the future. Which brings us to this important implication.

Implication: Since *that day will be His day*, make sure you know Him now.

What have you done with Christ? Repent and believe in Him today. The time to get ready for that day is now.