

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 “Because He’s Coming a Second Time”^{**1}

Main Idea: The Second Coming is full of splendor for two reasons, according to 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10.

I. Because He’s coming a second time, we have *help* for the present (5-7a).

- A. It changes our view of suffering (5).
 1. Suffering is the norm.
 2. Suffering is evidence that we belong to a different kingdom.
- B. It changes our view of living (6-7a).
 1. God will repay trouble-makers with trouble.
 2. God will repay the troubled with relief.

II. Because He’s coming a second time, we have *hope* for the future (7b-10).

- A. It will be a time of *revelation* (7b).
 1. It will be a supernatural day.
 2. It will be a spectacular day.
 3. It will be a severe day.
- B. It will be a time of *retribution* (8-9).
 1. He will cut off the ungodly from His presence.
 2. He will cut off the ungodly from His glory.
- C. It will be a time of *reward* (10).
 1. We will glorify Him.
 2. We will marvel at Him.

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

Reminder: In two weeks we will be voting on some revisions to our Articles of Faith. One in particular has to do with our eschatology statement. In section 7 we are emphasizing our pre-millennial conviction. That has not changed. In section 17, however, we are adopting a more general statement regarding the timing of the rapture. We don’t think it’s wise nor necessary to make belief in the pre-tribulational rapture position a pre-requisite for membership at WBC, as it presently is. While this position will continue to be taught in our church, what will be required for membership, if approved, will be an affirmation of a pre-millennial position but not necessarily a pre-tribulational affirmation.

To help us approach this decision with the Scriptures clearly in mind, we’ve been doing a biblical study of eschatology. This is week five in a series called, “*Stay Awake: The End Is Coming.*” We’ve worked through Jesus’ teaching in Mark 13 called the Olivet discourse. Last time we enjoyed 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 together. Today we’ll build on that by considering 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10.

Scripture Reading: 2 Thessalonians 1

I’ve been reading a very helpful book on the Psalms of Ascent by Stephen Yuille recently, and this week the author offered a vivid description I’d like to share with you.

We live in a world that’s unable to satisfy our greatest thirst. Our soul is spiritual; the material can’t satisfy it. Our soul is eternal; the temporal can’t satisfy it. Our soul is exceptional; the trivial can’t satisfy it. Yet what does the world offer? You guessed it: the material, temporal, and trivial...

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage see the message preached at WBC on 6/15/97 in the “What Makes Christianity Christian?” series.

David Wells explains, ‘The American way of life may be the envy of the world, its gadgets and accoutrements sought after and emulated, but the American version of happiness, it turns out, is quite lethal. America is a violent and disturbed country. It’s teenagers have the highest suicide rate in the world...it leads the world in the consumption of drugs, lethal and illegal, in addictions of various kinds in divorce, in the incidence of depressive illness, and in the marketing of a vast ranger of therapies to coneract these problems—all of which points to a vast underlying unhappiness.’

...As Thomas Watson observes, ‘Millions of people mistake both the nature of blessedness and the way to get it.’ Why? They equate it with outward things: possessions,k experiences, achievements, and relationships. But here’s what eludes them: blessedness isn’t found in changing conditions and circumstances, but in an unchanging God.²

[for the entire reading, see ch 9, “Discovering Blessedness,” on Psalm 128; page 91]

When we look at our world, what do we see but a society full of brokenness. Several years ago I started taking an inhaler for allergies and noticed this warning on the label, "This product contains chemicals that can harm the ozone. Use only as directed by your physician." A reminder we are living in a *broken* world.

We see brokenness in the environment, brokenness in government, brokenness in many aspects of our educational systems. Sex is broken, the family is broken, and even the church often appears to be broken.

In the face of so much brokenness, what's the answer? When hope is under attack, what can restore hope? Yuille is right. Blessedness isn’t found in changing conditions and circumstances, but *in an unchanging God*.

If we want happiness, true happiness, we must know God. If we want to increase our happiness, we must increase our knowledge of God. By knowledge, I don’t mean merely facts about Him. I mean really knowing Him, personally, experientially, relationally.

And there’s something about God that produces intense joy even when the circumstances of life are the hardest. It’s knowing what He is going to do in the future.

Biblical Christianity is committed to the truth that there's more to life than meets the eye. The present challenges, at home, at work, at school, they’re not the end. Indeed, the grave is not the end. There's life beyond this life, eternal life.

This biblical hope is summed in an event that is coming. Indeed, the Bible talks about it over and over, and we’re going to talk about it this morning.

Jesus Christ is coming again. Everything points to that event. Everything will be made right by that event. Simply put, because Jesus is coming to earth a second time, we have two things according to today’s passage, 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10.

I. Because He’s coming a second time, we have *help* for the present (5-7a).

There are obviously many places in the Bible to which we could turn to develop the theme of Jesus' return. We could turn to Acts 1, where immediately following the Lord's ascension, an angel guaranteed His return. And certainly, the book of Revelation addresses the subject in vivid terms. But I want to unfold this great hope from the

² J. Stephen Yuille, *Longing for Home: A Journey Through the Psalms of Ascent*, p. 91.

vantage point of 2 Thessalonians 1, for here we see in practical terms the splendor of the Second Coming. This event offers us *help* for the present, 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.³

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. It's sobering to ponder that more followers of Christ have been killed 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 disinterested, or perhaps interested but weak and frustrated to do something about the brutality? Or does that mean that these Christians are being punished, or that they lack faith? Not at all!

It's actually 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. It actually proves the opposite.

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

May I ask you something? Is there evidence that *you* belong to God's kingdom? If you are living for Christ, you will make choices for which the world will not applaud. It will cost you something. Has it?

A man is in a hard marriage situation. His friends tell him to cut his losses and move on, but he's choosing to work at that hard marriage because he wants his wife and kids and others to see Christ in him.

A teenage gal gets pressure from her classmates. "Come on, everybody's doing it!" But she perseveres in her pursuit of holiness, no matter how harsh the criticism becomes.

Kingdom values show up at the office too, and on the tax return, and when helping your kids sign up for extracurriculars.

Is there evidence that you are persevering 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.

³NIV Study Bible, p. 1829.

"But it gets so hard," you say. "How can we endure the suffering? I need help. 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 a couple of 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 produces a powerful change of perspective on how we live now. 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? He tells us right here. He'll do it at the coming revelation of His Son, Jesus the Christ. And notice here that 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 ever suffer abuse? Yes, they do. Does it sometimes seem like trouble-makers are getting away with their abusive 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."⁴

Any difficult people in your life? When we're prone to retaliate, here's the reminder that helps us pursue the Christlike response. God will repay. The Day is coming when 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, as it were. The second is what He will give to those who endured trouble—*rest*, or "relief" in the NIV and ESV. "There remains, therefore, a *rest* to the people of God (Heb. 4:9)."

The word 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 it won't last 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.

By giving us the doctrine of the Second Coming, the Lord says to us, "Take heart, my child! Relief is coming!" Oh, how we need doctrine in our churches, and this doctrine in

⁴in John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, p. 30.

particular. Jesus is coming again. Knowing this gives us *help* as we face the pain of the present. It will be worth it all when we see Jesus.

II. Because He's coming a second time, we have *hope* for the future (7b-10).

Church names often tell a lot about a church. Many 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 and do it *now*, namely, to the second coming of Christ. It is our *hope*!

We learn three characteristics of Christ's second coming in verses 7-10.

A. It will be a time of *revelation* (7b). Let's 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, to rescue His Church, and the dead in Christ and those living will be "caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air". That event is known as the *rapture*. The event before us in 2 Thessalonians, it seems, refers not to the rapture, but to a subsequent event, the *revelation* of Christ, 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. When He came the first time, most inhabitants on planet earth didn't even know it, and nearly all of those who did rejected Him. This was no unexpected glitch in God's plan, however, but the very reason for which God sent Him, so that through His Son's rejection, crucifixion, and resurrection, He might rescue sinners who would repent and put their faith in Him.

That was then. That was at His first coming. But His second coming, the day of His revelation, will be different in three ways (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, the supernatural will descend upon the natural. God will break into history. The Lord Jesus will leave His throne in heaven, not to enter the world as a babe in a manger, but in an awesome display of His power this world has yet to see.

2. *It will be a spectacular day.* "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire." The AV and ESV places this phrase in verse 8, but it may belong in verse 7 (as in the NIV). Fire in the Bible is a symbol of the divine presence. 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.

We see this in Revelation 1 where John sees and 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*."

I think we use the word “awesome” much too flippantly, but this, my friend, will certainly be awesome. It will be a supernatural day, and 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. Not one person.

When Jesus returns, He will be accompanied by His mighty angels. What will the angels do? Jesus Himself answered that question in Matthew 13:41-42, for it will be their 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, this gathering and separating and binding and burning? Paul actually explains it for us in the next verses, and this brings us to a second characteristic of Christ's second coming. First, it will be a time of revelation. Second...

B. It will be a time of retribution (8-9). Consider carefully what Jesus will do when He appears, verse 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 inflict *vengeance* (ESV).

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 stir your soul, my friend? There is coming a time of retribution. Do you need a motivation to make evangelism a greater priority in your life? Here it is. You and I have neighbors and family members and workmates and classmates who are facing divine retribution. They will stand before the all-knowing gaze of the King of kings, and He will judge them, and since they refused to receive His provision for their sins, He will condemn them in their sins.

And so we must plead with them now, for today is the day of salvation. 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. 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." Here is the punishment that awaits the ungodly. They will experience never-ending destruction associated with two horrible realities.

1. *He will cut off the ungodly from His presence.* This is what the Lord says He will do. 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. And that will be the penalty that a holy God will pour out on those who do not know Him. A second horrible reality...

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 farmers⁵, 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 too 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."

Dear friends, we need to think often about the second coming. According to Paul, it's one the reasons why participating in communion is so important, which we'll be doing next Sunday evening. "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes* (1 Cor 11:26)."

What's coming is 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."

"For whom will the Second Coming be a time of reward?" you ask. Notice Paul's terms. In verse 10, Paul refers to "his holy people ['saints']" 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. That is, 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. What kind of reward? Here's what that day will hold for us who know Christ, two incredible privileges.

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."

See also: Ephesians 2:6-7

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.

⁵ Wiersbe, 194

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 be. 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.

And this, this amazing sight, is something we're to prepare ourselves for now. By beholding Him now, beholding Him in His Word by faith, enabled by His Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness, with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 "Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory... So we fix our eyes on what is unseen... What is unseen is eternal."

This takes us back to where we began this message. *We live in a world that's unable to satisfy our greatest thirst. Our soul is spiritual; the material can't satisfy it. Our soul is eternal; the temporal can't satisfy it. Our soul is exceptional; the trivial can't satisfy it. Yet what does the world offer? You guessed it: the material, temporal, and trivial... Blessedness isn't found in changing conditions and circumstances, but in an unchanging God.*

Sometimes God in His mercy sends a wake-up call to remind us we were made for more than this world can offer. A blown business venture. A hospital stay. A relationship that's gone sour. Significant losses? Yes, but also powerful reminders that we were made for Him, and that blessedness, true happiness, is found in Him alone.

How do we come to know Him? By placing our faith in His Son, the One who came the first time to rescue us by dying for our sins and conquering the grave. If you want to know God today, put your total trust in Christ.

But don't stop there. Live every day with the assurance that He is coming a second time. Get ready to marvel at Him, to see Him receive the glory He deserves. And resolve to give Him that glory now by living for Him.

Take Inventory: 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.