

Second Sunday of End Time — Last Judgment

November 10, 2019

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 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. **6** God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you **7** and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. **8** He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. **9** They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might **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.

"Resilience until Revelation"

It would be nice to have an off day. You have dreamed of having your own business. When it finally becomes a reality, you know it will require long hours and lots of energy. But after working twelve hour days seven days a week and finally planning to take a day off, you get the call that your manager is sick and you need to come in anyway. Your children grow older and become more independent. But as you are getting used to those little ones getting themselves dressed while you have a few moments to yourself, you walk into the kitchen to see the horrendous mess that results from them trying to do breakfast all by themselves.

Being a Christian can feel like that. Living the Christian life can feel like you are constantly under pressure, you always have to be on your "A Game." The times you relax a little bit, problems come your way. When you try to take some time off, unhealthy spiritual habits develop almost overnight. When we start to feel overwhelmed just by living out our calling from God, that's when we learn what resilience really means. People think of it as grit or the ability to bounce back after a tough break or being able to roll with the punches and keep functioning. From 2 Thessalonians we see that God is calling us to be resilient by staying in our Christian identity. As life throws us challenges, we stay resilient by relying on Jesus. God's promises give us the power to have confidence he's going to take care of us even in the face of adversity. Ultimate vindication will come from God in his time. Until then, God gives us resiliency.

This opening chapter of 2 Thessalonians acknowledges a cruel reality for Christians. In the verse before the section we are studying today, the Apostle Paul says something odd: **"among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring."** (2 Thessalonians 1:4) In the verses that follow the Apostle Paul addresses those troubles directly. The word Paul uses here for troubles has the picture of being crowded and pressed against. The pressures in life are constricting and squeezing against you.

For the original audience Paul was talking to, that pressure was caused just from being Christians living in a world unfriendly to Christians. Sometimes we feel constricted by society because we stand up for biblical view of sexuality, that it's not my right to do what I want with my body, but sexuality is a gift to be enjoyed exclusively between husband and wife in marriage. Sometimes we feel the wicked and dishonest get rewarded, the deceitful and the powerful who prey upon the weak are getting ahead in life. It just feels like fewer people are speaking up for the truth or even care that Christianity is losing its influence in our world.

But we often feel under assault without serious persecutions that threaten our lives or livelihoods. When you are going the extra mile to show generosity to friends, it feels like they just take advantage of you. Your marriage feels like you are put in more of the effort and getting out fewer rewards. You feel like you're the only person in your family who is holding their act together, so you have to clean up everyone else's messes. You want to be more caring and more compassionate toward the people in your life who don't know Jesus, but it takes all your energy just to get through all the things you need to do each day.

The key question confronting us in 2 Thessalonians is how do you handle life's pressures? Do you easily get timid and discouraged? Do you fight back and struggle for justice on the world's terms? The hard part about being a believer is believing, trusting that God will work things out, having confidence that God will handle the injustices and mistreatments you face. That's why God calls his people to be resilient until the revelation of Jesus.

While God doesn't want us to sit around while we await his deliverance, we see tragic examples of Christians trying to solve troubles in ways that seem fair by human standards. Think about the black marks in history when Christians have earned a bad reputation. The Crusades and the inquisition. Times when colonized people were forced to convert or face torture. Christians in Germany before World War II who were afraid to criticize increasing evil because they thought the other political options might strip them of influence. Times when we can assume Christians were trying to right some wrongs to honor God. But their ways of handling pressures by relying on their own power ended up backfiring badly.

History shows us a better way. Resilience isn't about looking deep inside to trust in your own power. According to the Mayo Clinic's advice for resilience, one of the recommendations is to build stronger relationships.¹ For Christians resilience means reliance on Jesus. In the face of adversity we trust in God's deliverance. That's exactly the point of these verses from 2 Thessalonians. There is a surprising message when it comes to the things that aren't going our way. When we feel things aren't going right or we feel like failures or it seems like we are under attack, we usually interpret that to mean we are on the wrong path. We've done something wrong. We need to change course. Adapt our beliefs. But Paul has a very contradictory message to our assumptions of how things work. He says when we experience afflictions and oppression: **"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**

¹ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/resilience-training/in-depth/resilience/art-20046311>

you are suffering.” (2 Thessalonians 1:5) Instead of interpreting these setbacks as proof we’re on the wrong track, God wants you to know they are proof that you belong to Christ.

What we see isn’t always accurately reflecting reality. When I was growing up, my parents had a hard time getting babysitters for our family. It wasn’t just because there were five of us. It’s what we did while my parents were gone and how we treated those babysitters. But whatever we thought we were getting away with, no matter how much fun we had tormenting those poor teenagers, that was never really the end. Once my parents came home and took the baby-sitter back, the report led to some serious consequences. We may have had fun while my parents were away, but we ultimately had to answer for what we had done. You think we would have learned eventually, but it was no fun to face justice from my parents.

Right now, things might seem unfair. In our day to day lives, it might feel like we are suffering unjustly. But God knows what is going on. And God will work his justice. The Apostle Paul gives us this assurance: **“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.”** (2 Thessalonians 1:6,7) God is just. He will make sure everything conforms to his standards of fairness. The darkness of unbelief that seems to dominate will be overcome. The oppression from unbelief that feels invincible now will be exposed for the deception that it is. God calls us to be resilient as we await his justice.

Not until the revelation of Jesus will we get to see ultimate vindication. Paul tells us when this will happen: **“This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.”** (2 Thessalonians 1:7) When Jesus comes a second time, he will come in judgment. Jesus came the first time to accomplish salvation. When Jesus returns, he will make clear what has been beneath the surface during our earthly existence. Afflictions and oppression against God’s people is evidence of ungodliness and unbelief. Jesus will reveal this rejection for what it is. Perseverance in the faith during persecution is a sign of trust in God’s promises. Jesus will bring to light the faith in the hearts of his faithful people.

And so, in the present, we have warnings from Jesus. We have his promises of what will happen at his return. Paul tells us: **“He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”** (2 Thessalonians 1:8) Some will suppress God’s truth revealed in a variety of ways. Some will hear God’s Word, but reject it. Some will have no time for God’s will in their lives. Some will outright reject God’s gifts of life and forgiveness through Jesus. They will insist on taking their own approach to salvation. They will depend on their own faithfulness to win God’s favor. They cling to the false hope of doing being good enough and hoping God will accept them. But whatever path they choose through life that is a detour from God’s gift of salvation through faith in Jesus is a rejection of his grace. Their rejection will force them to face God on the basis of their unbelief. The consequences will be severe: **“They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.”** (2 Thessalonians 1:9) In his justice, God will cause them to live apart from him and separated from his blessings.

These words aren't just written to terrify the ungodly. God wants to give his people confidence that he will bring about ultimate vindication. Since Jesus will be revealed in glory, we can live in resilience. Work faithfully until Jesus comes back with confidence of God's victory for his people.

When Thomas Edison was in school he was told he was too stupid to learn anything and should go into a field that didn't require intelligence. He tried 9,000 experiments before producing his first successful light bulb. Walt Disney was fired from his job at a newspaper in Kansas City because he lacked imagination and had no original ideas. Our world is a better place today because they didn't give up when they experienced rejection. They bounced back. They kept working. They had bigger goals in mind than making critics happy.

For Christians who struggle with pressures and adversity and suffering, our resilience relies on Jesus. Trust in God's promises as the only solution. Through Jesus there is good news for every human being. Forgiveness is offered free of charge to every man, woman and child through the sacrifice of Jesus. Because Jesus finished his work, God has declared every person on the planet innocent of all sin. In this world we face violence, hatred, and fear. But in Jesus we have certainty of peace, acceptance and security. Jesus is not just a good option, he's the only solution. Jesus isn't just the best choice, he is humanity's only hope.

When you start to wonder about the guarantee of Jesus' coming back, just look to his first coming. When you start to doubt whether justice will really be handed out, look at how Jesus lived his life perfectly after humbling himself to come to this earth. When you question whether perseverance in the faith is worth it, see the cross of Jesus and everything he endured. When you are skeptical about God's methods for overcoming hardship and evil in your life, ponder the afflictions and sufferings Jesus endured with the goal of your salvation in mind.

Resilience relying on Jesus tells us his way is the best way to deal with life's troubles. When life seems nerve-wracking as you await the final judgment Jesus brings, hold onto his promises. Find confidence in his cross. Let joy dominate your heart because of his resurrection. The final revelation of Jesus at the end of all things means your resilience is all worth it. You will experience the glory of Jesus. You will bask in wonder at his divine majesty. You will be with Jesus without any separation from him by sin or any sinful oppressors. You will enjoy the glory of his strength without end. And so you and I can roll up our sleeves and serve him faithfully until he returns. We can live with resilience until Jesus is revealed. Amen.