

**The Vengeance of the Lord Jesus, Part 2**

Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

Code: 53-3

It's time for us now to open God's Word. Second Thessalonians is our text this morning and chapter 1 verses 6 through 10. We started to study these verses last time, we continue that study this morning.

The world is waiting for the return of Jesus Christ whether they know it or not, or whether they believe it or not. His return is the climax of history. And I suppose making a statement like that would conjure up the obvious question...why should anyone believe that Jesus Christ is coming back? Why should anyone believe that a man who was crucified two thousand years ago will return to judge and rule the world.

What compels me to believe that? And I answer...the Word of God demands it, the Word of God states unequivocally over and over that Jesus will return. The words of Jesus Himself promised it repeatedly. The Holy Spirit inspiring biblical writers affirms it. The very nature of the church demands it for the church is the bride waiting for the bridegroom. God's plan for judgment on the world demands it. There will be a time of reckoning. There will be a judgment and Jesus Christ says God is to be the judge. God's promise to Israel demands it for God promised Israel a Messiah who would bring them an earthly kingdom. The reign of Satan demands it, Satan cannot go on unendingly as the usurper who rules the world. He must be conquered. He must be banished and Jesus Christ alone can do that.

Furthermore, the humiliation of Christ in His first coming demands that He comes again. The last glimpse the world had of Jesus is a bleeding, dying criminal on a cross. That is not the last vision, however, that they will have, for He will come in full glory. His humiliation demands that He come back in exaltation. And finally, the hope of Christians demands it. It is our hope. We look forward to that day when Jesus comes who is now preparing a place for us and will some day come and take us to that place.

In other words, at the very heart of all redemptive history and divine revelation and Christian experience is the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. In this passage Paul affirms this Christian hope and he does it in order to encourage the Thessalonians because they were under such severe persecution. And he was saying to them and to all believers who have suffered this won't go on unendingly, Jesus will come back.

Let's look at our text, 2 Thessalonians 1, beginning in verse 6. "For after all, it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power when He comes to be glorified in His saints in that day and to be marveled at among all who have believed, for our testimony to you was believed."

In that text the key is in verse 7..."The Lord Jesus shall be revealed." The word "revealed" means disclosed, unveiled, it is the apokalupsis, the apocalypse, the unveiling, the revealing. As we have been noting in our study of the book of Revelation, Jesus came the first time veiled, He came the first time hidden in human flesh so that His full glory was not seen. The second time He is unveiled, He is revealed and He comes in full glory. To give us some sense of what that means, Paul adds three prepositional phrases when he says, "The Lord shall be revealed from heaven, with His mighty angels, in flaming fire." He comes then in the glory of His unveiled person.

Now when the Lord Jesus comes Paul says in this passage two things happen. The first one is at the beginning of verse 7, He comes to give relief. He comes to give relief. The second is at the beginning of verse 8, He comes to deal out retribution. Those are the two keys. He comes for relief and He comes for retribution. Relief means rest, refreshment, peace. He comes to bring the end of all hardship. He comes to bring the end of all difficulty. He comes to bring the end of all trials. He comes to bring the end of all persecution. He comes to bring the end of all pain, of all sorrow, of all trouble. What an encouragement. What an encouragement.

But secondly, in verse 8, He comes to deal out retribution. That means He comes to judge. He comes to punish. He comes to give full vengeance. He comes to pour out wrath. He comes to curse. He comes to condemn. What terror.

Two absolute opposites, 180 degrees from one another. He comes to bring relief, He comes to bring retribution. He comes for rest, He comes for punishment. He comes for refreshment, He comes for vengeance. He comes to bless, He comes to curse. Two-fold purpose.

Paul is not inventing this, nor is it the first time the Scriptures have talked about this two-fold coming. Jesus Himself made it abundantly clear that the nature of His coming would be two-fold. In Matthew chapter 13 Jesus says in verse 40, "Therefore just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels and they will gather out of His Kingdom all stumbling blocks and those who commit lawlessness and will cast them into the furnace of fire. And in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." That's the retribution. When He comes the angels will collect the ungodly and cast them into hell.

Later on in Matthew chapter 24 He says, verse 30, "The Son of Man comes, He comes on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory and He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other."

In Matthew 13 the angels gather the ungodly for burning. In Matthew 24 the angels gather the elect, the godly, to take them into the Kingdom, then they will shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, as it said also in Matthew chapter 13.

So, Jesus promised this not only in the passages that I read, but in numerous other passages that at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ there would be a two-fold work. And all humanity falls into one of those two categories. The whole world will experience the return of Christ. Every eye will see Him. Every human being alive or dead who has ever lived or is living at the time will experience the effect of the Second Coming either for relief or for retribution. All of destiny ultimately falls into those two categories.

As we look at this text we look at those two categories then, first of all, retribution...retribution. Paul here, as I noted, is echoing what Jesus promised, that he would come and that there would be a gathering together of the ungodly and that they would be cast into hell which is vengeance, wrath and punishment. Jesus promised that was the purpose of His coming and Paul reiterates that at this particular point in this text. Actually there isn't any text that I know of and I have scoured them all obviously in the New Testament, there isn't any text in the New Testament outside the book of Revelation that is as poignant and potent in portraying the fierceness of the Lord Jesus as the executioner of the ungodly as this one. It is a very strong statement that the Spirit of God makes through the pen of Paul.

Now as we look at the subject of retribution in this text, it draws us to ask three questions, three simple questions, three one-word questions...why, who and how...why, who and how? The first question, why...why would Jesus Christ come back to do this? Why would He come back, verse 8, to deal out retribution, vengeance, punishment? Why would He come...verse 9...to make people pay the penalty? Why?

Verse 6 gives us the answer. "For after all, it is only just for God to repay." It is a matter of justice, that is why. It is only just. It is the proper administration of God's justice. It is right for punishment to be meted out on those who have violated the law.

We understand that, don't we, in a human realm. We understand justice, at least to some extent. We are definitely upset and disturbed in our society when we do not see criminals brought to justice and when we see the innocent people suffer. We have a sense of justice built into us, it's the image of God, it's the moral law of God woven into the fabric of life and society. We understand justice. We

understand retribution. We understand there's a right punishment for criminals who violate law. If that is true and since it's true in the human realm, it is obviously perfectly true in God's realm. And so why? Why will Jesus come back and deal out vengeance? For after all, it is only just for God to repay. It is no more and no less than God's justice. It is the right punishment for criminals who have violated God's law. In fact, the root word for "retribution" is the same root as the word for "just, or right." It is not vindictive, it is not some emotional frenzy that God gets Himself into. It is not some level of exasperation or frustration that Jesus has reached that allows Him to have an out-of-control emotion, it is not vindictive, it is not out of control, it is simply the just repayment of punishment by the perfectly righteous judge on those who have broken His law willfully. God cannot be unjust. God will do what is just.

Isaiah 45, among a myriad of Scriptures, gives us insight into the justice of God in a very unique way. Scriptures from one end of the Old Testament to the other end, even in the New Testament, speak about the justice of God. But this one looks at it in a more vivid way. Verse 20 of Isaiah 45 says, "Gather yourselves and come, draw near together, you fugitives of the nations, they have no knowledge who carry about their wooden idol and pray to a God who cannot save." Now here's the scene. God says...All right, you idolaters, all right you people who don't worship Me, it's court time...this is a summons...this is a summons.

They're being called into court. They're being indicted before God. So in verse 21 God says, "Declare and set forth your case. Indeed, let them consult together, go ahead and hire a lawyer, get your counsel, make your case, and come in and explain to Me why you have done this and why you should not be punished." and He reminds them in verse 21 that, "There is no other God beside Me, a righteous God and Savior, there is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself, the Word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance. They will say of Me, 'Only in the Lord are righteousness and strength.' Men will come to Him."

In other words, God reiterates, "I am the only God. That has been made abundantly clear. You have seen it. You should have known it, you should have responded to it. You should have worshiped Me. Put your case together and tell Me why you shouldn't be punished for rejecting Me." And they put their case together and they lose, "And all who are angry at God are put to shame. But in the Lord, all of the true offspring of Israel are justified and will glory."

God pulls people into court and He says, "Tell Me why you've rejected Me. Put your case together and then I'll tell you why your case doesn't hold water. I am the only God. You have known that, I have revealed that and I will put you to shame." Every person will stand before that tribunal and face the reality of the fact that they rejected God, if in fact they did.

The world doesn't want to admit that. They don't want to admit that they are subject to the justice of God. In Ezekiel chapter 33 verse 17 it says, "Yet your fellow citizens say the way of the Lord is not just." They want to accuse God of injustice when it is their own way that is not right, or just. "When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he'll die in it. When the wicked turns from his wickedness and practices justice and righteousness, he'll live by it. Yet you say the way of the Lord is not right. Oh, house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways. I'll judge you and it will be a just judgment." You may accuse God of being unjust, but He is not.

Listen to Job 37:23. "The Almighty, He will not do violence to justice." He will not do violence to justice. God is an absolutely perfectly just God. He will never violate justice. "He is great in counsel. He is mighty in deed. His eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men. He gives to everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds," Jeremiah 32:19. God makes a just judgment.

In Revelation 19:2 it says, "His judgments are true and righteous." God is perfectly holy. God has given a law. God has called men to obey it. And God will judge those who do not.

So, consistent with the justice of God, He will act in the Lord Jesus to bring just punishment. And He knows who has violated the law and how because He knows everything. So it is no more than they deserve. When Paul says very directly and very straightforward, "After all, it is only just," he is saying something that is axiomatic, that is it's a self-evident truth. Obvious, it's only just. And he says it with utter certainty. This is absolutely clear, it is just, it is right and God will do it because He is a just God.

As I said, there are many Old Testament passages that focus on strictly the justice of God. Let me just read you Deuteronomy 32:41. "If I sharpen My flashing sword and My hand takes hold on justice, I will render vengeance on My adversaries and I will repay those who hate Me." God says I'll take My sword and I'll do My vengeance and it will be absolutely just.

The truth of the matter is God wouldn't be righteous if He didn't, and God wouldn't be God if He wasn't righteous. The Scriptures emphasize the absolute justice of God in His judgments. And when He comes, the Lord Jesus, to do that judgment, He will do it before the whole universe of men and the whole universe of angels and every one will see it and every one will be forced to acclaim that God is absolutely just, that when He blesses it is just because Christ has paid the just penalty. And when He damns it is just because the sinner must pay and the damned themselves will not even dream of challenging or questioning the verdict that sends them to their doom. God is just. And a God who is just in His nature and perfectly so can do nothing less than a just act.

So God's vengeance in Christ is based on a principle, an inviolable, spiritual law bound up in His perfect holy nature. And the principle is God must repay...that's what he says, "It is only just for God

to repay." To repay, apodidomi, to give back--give back. There can be no rational argument against that. There can be no moral argument against that. That divine judgment is reasonable. That divine judgment makes sense. Whatever a man sows, he...what?...he reaps. God says, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." I'll give you back for what you gave Me. That is justice. Just as God is just in the way He brings believers to salvation, so He is just in the way He brings unbelievers to damnation. The justice of God cannot be questioned, anymore than God can be questioned. He is perfect.

In Luke 13 there's a fascinating story that starts the chapter. "On the same occasion there was some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the sacrifices." Here was some Galileans who had come down to make sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem and they were in there making their sacrifices and Pilate sent his men and they killed them. And there these men were supposedly serving God, supposedly doing religious deeds, offering sacrifices to God in the temple, and Pilate's men killed them. "And He answered and said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? Did they get slaughtered because they were worse than anybody else? I tell you no, but unless you repent you'll all likewise perish.'"

What a statement. They weren't worse than you, they just illustrate what you're going to get. "Do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem?" In other words, people have the idea that some people get killed because they're worse than anybody else. He says that's not the story at all. I tell you, verse 5, "Unless you repent you'll all likewise perish." When you see somebody perish like that, just realize that that is deserved by everybody, it just doesn't happen to everybody the same way. It's just. The question isn't...that's not fair, why did God let those guys while they were worshiping die? Why did God let those religious people get killed? Or why did God let those innocent bystanders walking down the street when a tower fell on them? I can understand a criminal getting killed, I can understand a murderer getting killed, but these were just religious people or innocent bystanders. And Jesus answers...You better be careful, that's what's going to happen to you, too. You're headed for judgment.

It isn't a question of who is the worse, it's a question of all of you are in the same condition. Sin deserves death and sin deserves hell and sin deserves judgment and sin brings vengeance. Man is not helpless. Man is not some kind of careless victim. He chooses his sin. He chooses rebellion. He chooses unbelief. And the threat of God's vengeance and Christ's judgment is God's way of making the path of the transgressor hard. It's a deterrent, it's a roadblock on the way to hell. When people fail to heed God's call and continue in their sin, God is just in meting out a right punishment. That's why Romans 1:18 says that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men because God is just. All sin must be punished. It is just, verse 6, for God to repay, it is just. This is the reason why. It's an old principle. It's not a new one. God has always operated on this principle.

The second question that comes up is the question who...who? On whom does this vengeance fall? Verse 6, "It is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you...those who afflict you, those who persecute you." Here are these dear Thessalonians being persecuted for their faith in Christ and he says to them this encouraging word, "The time will come when God will do His vengeance." Personal private vengeance is not allowed. You're not to do that on your own. You're to forgive your enemy and love your enemy, you're not to seek personal vengeance. God will do that, and you can be assured of it. Those who are afflicting you will be afflicted by God.

So who is going to be the recipient of this? Those who afflict believers. What level of affliction? Well it's not really defined by anybody who attacks Christians in any way, shape or form. It could be everything from the extreme of burning them at the stake or killing them, martyring them, shipping them off to prison, all the way down to accusing them falsely of cheating or lying, trying to destroy their integrity, their credibility, trying to undermine their character. It could be anything down to personal animosity and hatred that allows you to speak to another and to speak evil of a Christian. Anyone who attacks the people of God is vulnerable. You go all the way back in to Genesis chapter 12 and you remind yourself that God says, "Whoever curses Israel, I'll...what?...I'll curse, whoever blesses Israel, I'll bless." God says if you touch Israel you touch the apple of My eye, that's a Hebrew phrase for the pupil of my eye. You touch Israel, you poke your finger in My eye and that irritates Me.

In Matthew chapter 18 Jesus said, "You touch one of these little ones who belong to Me and you'd be better off if a millstone be hanged around your neck and you were drowned in the depths of the sea." "I know that offenses against them are going to come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes." If you're going to be one who offends a believer, you'd be better off if you're going to offend with your hand to cut it off, if you're going to offend with your eye to pluck it out because if you're going to offend anybody who belongs to Me, you're going to feel My vengeance.

This is not a new principle. God will bring retribution and vengeance upon those who have touched His people. But that's not the limit of whose going to feel the vengeance because that group of persecuting people belong to a larger group and that larger group is defined in verse 8. And there are two phrases there that define that larger group.

First of all, the retribution will be dealt to those who do not know God...who do not know God. That means to say they have no personal relationship with God. They may imagine that they know Him, they may know about Him, but they do not in the truest and purest sense know God. And therein lies the problem. Jesus said in John 17:3, "And this is eternal life that they may know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." Knowing God is the key. But people who do not know God are going to feel the retribution.

You say, "Well now wait a minute. How is it that they are responsible for knowing God? How can everyone be responsible?" Back to Romans 1 again. "The wrath of God is revealed...verse 18...from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

What do you mean they suppress it? "That which is known about God is evident within them for God made it evident to them." God has planted the knowledge of Himself within every person.

I think that's what John had in mind when he said, "Christ is the light that lights every man that comes into the world." There is the knowledge of God that is there. And then not only is it on the inside but on the outside, creation makes His invisible attributes visible.

So they do know God on some level, "But because they do not honor Him as God or give thanks, but became futile in their speculations and their foolish heart was darkened, professing to be wise they became fools. They exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and birds and four-footed animals and crawling things. Therefore God gave them over."

When man had the knowledge that could lead him to the true knowing, he rejected it. And so we can say that hell is for people who don't know God. It could be a Gentile, definitely could be a Gentile. In Jeremiah chapter 10 and verse 25, that concept of not knowing God is referred to Gentiles, "Pour out Thy wrath on the nations that do not know Thee." But it could also be a Jew because in Jeremiah also chapter 9 and verse 6 he says to the Jews, "Through deceit they refuse to know Me." So he's not just talking here about Gentiles, anyone, Jew or Gentile, who does not personally know God. Know means more than just an intellectual awareness, know means more than just some superficial information, know means a deep, true relationship, knowing God in the true sense of a relationship. Paul says about the Galatians, "At that time when you did not know God you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods." In other words, in your preconversion state you didn't know God. That's pretty typical.

Paul in writing Ephesians chapter 2 verse 12 says the same thing about people in the world in general. He says, "They're excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, they are strangers to the covenants of promise, they have no hope and are without God in the world." Those who do not know God, Jew or Gentile, they're ignorant, they're willfully ignorant. Oh they may think they know God like the people in Matthew 7:23 who say, "Lord, Lord, haven't we done this in Your name and that in Your name?" And He says, "Depart from Me, I never knew you." We don't have any knowledge of each other, we don't know one another in the deepest intimacy of that word. Hell is going to be populated by people who don't know God, most of them will be religious, most of them will have believed in a god, or gods. All of them will not have known the true God. That is the illusion, the damning illusion of religion, and listen carefully, that is why Satan spends 99.9 percent of his time in false religion



because it is the most damning, because it gives the false sense of knowing God.

There's a second definition of these people who will feel retribution. Not only are they the ones who persecute Christians but they belong to a larger group of people who do not know God. And then he adds, "Those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."

Here are some whose guilt is even intensified. It is one thing to have the knowledge of God innately, to have the knowledge of God from creation on the outside and be responsible for that and turn from that basic knowledge, that perceivable intellectual knowledge and to turn away from God. It is something else then to reject the gospel of our Lord Jesus. That even brings a greater guilt. The hottest hell, the severest punishment is reserved for those who rejected the gospel. All those people who perished in Old Testament times, all those people who refused the knowledge of God which was available to them, who refused to know God truly will suffer forever in hell. But their punishment will not exceed the punishment of those who trampled the gospel. Since Jesus came and died and rose again, there is a greater responsibility and for rejection of the gospel, there is intensified guilt.

Some people don't know God because they reject that basic knowledge that God has given them and they never have any more knowledge. And so their rejection is at that level. Some people reject God even though they have heard more about Him, they've read about Him, they're exposed to Christianity, they still reject God. There are all kinds of levels of information in which people can still not know God. But the pinnacle is when you have heard the gospel and you have listened to the story of the cross and the resurrection and reject that, that is the most intense guilt that brings about the severest punishment, the hottest hell, the greatest vengeance.

In Hebrews 10 that is clearly stated. "If we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." If you reject the truth in Christ, that sacrifice, "There's nothing else for you but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment." All you've got to look forward to is a terrifying expectation of judgment. And the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries...hell. If you reject Christ, all you can expect is judgment and hell. And then in verse 28 he says, "Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses." If you reject the Old Testament, if you reject the Law of Moses, you're going to suffer. "But how much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God and regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has insulted the Spirit of grace?"

If you reject the gospel, a severer punishment comes. And then verse 30, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," and then verse 31, "It's a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." You see, when you don't obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, you bring upon yourself the severest retribution, the severest vengeance.

Acts chapter 17 and verse 30 and 31 reiterate this. It says in verse 31...verse 30, "There was a time when God overlooked things but now declares all men everywhere to repent because...actually He now commands...all men everywhere to repent because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a man whom He has appointed, the man whom He raised from the dead, even Christ." There was a time when God was more tolerant but now He commands everyone to repent because He sees the judgment coming at the return of Christ.

Now go back to 2 Thessalonians and think with me about the word "obey" there for a moment. "Those who do not obey the gospel," there's a lot in that word "obey." But what is basically there is the fact that it reminds us that the gospel is a command to be obeyed. That's right, it's a command. I think most of the time when we communicate the gospel we say...You know, it would be so wonderful if you would come to Christ because your sins would be forgiven and you'd be on your way to heaven...You really should do this because it will solve the problems of your anxiety and your needs personally...You need to do this because it will put your life in perspective, it will change your relationship...You need to do this because it will bring you joy and peace and blessing...You really ought to do this. And we encourage people that this is a wonderful thing to do and they really should do this. And what the Bible says is, "I command you to do it." The Father said, "This is My Son, listen to Him, obey Him."

This gospel is a command. It is not a suggestion, it is a command. That is why God will come in vengeance because you who disobey the command have flaunted yourself against His authority. It's a command to be obeyed. That's why Paul talks about the obedience of faith in the book of Romans. So when the gospel is preached, it is a command. When is the last time you said to somebody, "I command you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? God commands you." John the Baptist didn't come along or Jesus and say, "It would certainly be wonderful if you would repent," he said, "Repent, or else."

Who is going to feel the retribution of God? Those who persecute Christians who are part of a larger group who do not know God because they do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

A third question is how...how is this retribution meted out? Back to verse 6, "After all, it is only just for God to repay with affliction." That's how, with affliction, pain if you want another word, a synonym, pain. If you want a good definition of thlibo, this is the term used here, it's used in the New Testament in other places...the best illustration of what it can encompass is in 2 Corinthians 7:5. Paul says, "We came into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, no relief, we were afflicted," there's the same word, "on every side," and here he defines it, "conflicts without fears within, but God who comforts the depressed comforted us." What is it? It's affliction. It's depression. How is it defined? Conflict on the outside, fear on the inside. That's why it's the word "pressure, squeeze." You're squeezed between the terrors on the outside and the terrors on the inside. That's the punishment. God is going

to give you pain. God's going to make you feel that pain, misery. And that misery and pain with which He will afflict you is further described in verse 9, "And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction."

Now here we find something that needs our attention. The word "eternal," this pain, this misery, this depression, this affliction is forever. The word "eternal" is aion and it basically means a period of undefined length, age-long, however long the age is, that's how long this is. The reason it's always translated "eternal" is because it is always associated with eternal things. Seventy-five times aionis used in the New Testament, out of 75 only three refer to other than an endless duration, only three times is this word used for other than an endless duration...Romans 16:25; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2. Seventy-two of the seventy-five mean an endless duration. For example, it is used of God...God is aion, He is eternal, Romans 16:26. In John 3:16 it is used of our time in heaven, or our period in heaven which is eternal, forever. Hebrews 5:9 it is used of our salvation which is forever. In Hebrews 9:12 of our redemption which is forever...and on and on for 72 times, it must mean forever. The coming age has no end, as God has no end, as we have no end, as salvation has no end. It is not an abbreviated time, it is forever.

How is this vengeance and punishment going to come? It's going to come as pain, pressure, affliction, conflict in outside and fear inside crushing the person forever. He calls it here "destruction," which adds another component, olethros. The word means "ruin...ruin." It has the idea not of annihilation, not of being obliterated and put out of existence, but the idea of the loss of all that makes life worth living. It speaks of somebody who is ruined. It would be a...it would be a condition perhaps best most graphically articulated to you as a condition like the physical condition of a dying AIDS patient. You've seen them skin and bones lying on a bed with sunken faces and hollow glassy eyes unable to move, racked with killing disease, tortured with excruciating agony and unable to have the strength to even respond. Only it is that same condition forever, never the relief of death. You never die you just experience the uselessness, the hopelessness, the emptiness of a life with no meaning, no value, no worth, no accomplishment, no purpose, no goal, no future, no change, no hope. You're ruined forever.

The Lord Jesus had some terrifying things to say about this ruined existence. He said it is an experience of fiery torment. It is an experience that burns with a furious fire and yet gives no light to impenetrable darkness. It is an experience of weeping and grinding of teeth in pain and frustration. Soul and body are both ruined as far as worth and beauty are concerned. Any vestige of the image of God is gone. Consuming worms eat but never die and are never satisfied. The fire never goes out. There is no escape. And worst of all, there's no second chance. That's what happens, God pays back and He pays back with pain and He pays back with pain that lasts forever, pain that renders a person absolutely useless, ruined forever.

Then there are two reasons given why this life is so terrible. One, verse 9, "Away from the presence of the Lord." Wherever this place is called hell, God isn't there. There isn't a vestige of His presence there. In fact, in Luke 16 in the parable of...in the story, rather, of Lazarus and the rich man, there is a great gulf fixed between the place where the blessed are and the place where the cursed are. And that gulf separates the cursed from God and all that represents His presence. Imagine an existence like that. Imagine an existence in this kind of terrible ruined, worthless, useless, purposeless, painful, eternal existence where there is no vestige of anything that connects with God...James 1:17, James said, "All good things come from God, all perfect things come from God." There won't be any of them there...nothing good, nothing meaningful, nothing beautiful, nothing valuable, no joy, no peace, no love, nothing, no pleasure, nothing because God isn't there. Jesus said it in Matthew 7:23, He said, "Depart from Me," that's the point, "I don't know you, go out of My presence." That's what hell is, it's away from the presence of the Lord. There is nothing of God there, therefore there's no beauty, there's no joy, there's no pleasure, there's no purpose. God isn't there. You're gone, banished, exiled from God.]

As Leon Morris says, "Those who oppose the things of God here and now are not engaged in some minor error." This is not a minor error. There's no fleshly sentiment that can alter the consequences to not knowing God and not obeying the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

Then Paul adds another feature of hell, not only are they away from the presence of the Lord, but also they're away from the glory of His power. That's a magnificent reality, you know, the glory of His power. What does it mean? It means visible splendor, His majesty and the display of that majesty in power. They'll never see that. They'll never see that. There will be nothing of the presence of God there, there will be nothing of the power of God there. Nothing of His presence to comfort, nothing of His presence to give meaning, nothing of His presence to give beauty, pleasure, joy, peace, happiness, nothing of His presence to bring those things that make life worth living and nothing of His glory and His splendor and His majesty and His power.

Your company? The devil. Your company? His evil angels. And yet an eternal loneliness. Jesus is coming and He's bringing retribution. He's bringing retribution. Why? It's just, it is just. On whom? Those who persecute Christians who belong to that larger order of people who do not know God because they do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And how will the retribution come? It will come with pain that is eternal that ruins them and they will live forever without any vestige of the presence of the Lord or any display of His glorious power through all eternity. That's the coming of Jesus Christ. That's what it means to the people who reject Christ.

I have a friend, Spencer Nielsen(?), he writes The Nielsen Report which goes to executives of major corporations all across America and keeps them abreast of all the current data in terms of credit. It's a very scholarly and esteemed newsletter, quoted often in The Wall Street Journal and other places. In the December mailing of his newsletter, Spencer included the gospel, as he likes to do around

Christmas, to share that with all of these people. In response to that he receives letters, here is one from an executive of Bell Atlantic, the phone company on the east coast. "Dear Mr. Nielsen, I am writing to voice my displeasure at receiving the religious material insert in my last issue. This is most inappropriate and detracts from the strength of each subject in a stand alone manner. You should reevaluate this as a business practice. My guess is that most of your readers were put off by it." And the letter is signed.

This, he faxed to me, was his reply and he wanted to know if I thought this was a good reply. "Thank you for your December 30 letter. I was pleased to hear you noticed the Christmas message. Regarding your comment that it was inappropriate to include it in my newsletter, there is no such thing as an inappropriate time to talk about Jesus Christ. Each year I get an equal amount of letters and phone calls thanking me or objecting to the Christmas message I send. Negative comments are generally because they consider it offensive. The message of Christ is offensive. Christ was crucified by people who considered Him offensive. He tells us we are all born sinners in need of salvation, that we must be washed clean by His blood shed on a cross, that no one will get to heaven unless they come to the realization they are powerless to save themselves, that Christ died to redeem them from punishment that they can't escape unless they accept Him as their Savior. That's all pretty offensive, but true. Over the centuries His disciples were stoned, beheaded and tortured for simply confessing their belief in Him. So I consider myself fortunate in this age to be able to speak freely about Him without anyone being able to stop me. I don't mind the criticism as long as it brings anyone who is not saved to the realization it is necessary to make life's most important decision now, before it is too late. Sincerely..." and he signs his name.

How can anyone who understands where history is going and what the end of it is take any other approach? If we understand that Jesus Christ is coming to deal out retribution to all those who know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and that what awaits them is pain forever in a ruined condition, away from His presence and glory for all eternity, it would seem to me that nothing could restrain us from compelling people to that realization offensive or not. And I thank God for the faithfulness of Spencer and others who hold back nothing. God would be offended if we didn't warn the sinner, amen?

Father, we thank You that You have given us a clear word that we don't need to waver and wander like unguided men struggling to comprehend truth for it has been made so crystal clear in Your Word. When we understand what is coming we are compelled. How can..how can we do less? Even if they consider it an offense, we do it because they so desperately need to hear the truth. Father, our hearts grieve when we think about the horrors of eternal punishment and we ask that we, like Paul, knowing those terrors would do all we can to persuade men to turn to Christ, to take their place with those who will receive relief and rest and refreshment and not those who receive retribution. I pray for every person in the hearing of this message that they would look at their own heart and be sure

that they stand in the group of those who will receive the rest, the relief because they know God since they have obeyed the gospel, the good news that Jesus died and rose again for them.

While your heads are bowed in just a closing moment, if you are under the distinct conviction that you are in the group headed for retribution, why don't you cry out to God and repent of your sin, confirm that you believe Jesus Christ died and rose again for you, acknowledge Him as Lord and Savior. Ask God to save you, to move you to the group of those who will be relieved when He comes, refreshed forever. This is serious. There is no more serious issue you will ever face in eternity than this one. And if God is speaking to your heart, now is the time for you to respond, let us help you.

Father, we pray now for those who have searched their hearts and cried to You to save them, O God, save them by Your grace. Count their faith as saving faith though they could never, nor could we, do anything to please You in the flesh. Father, may You receive that simple faith that says I turn from my sin, I believe in Christ as my Lord and Savior, I give Him my life. May You receive that as that Holy Spirit prompted act which opens to them the door of salvation and moves them from retribution to relief when Jesus comes. We pray that You will save...save some headed for hell, even this hour, for Christ's sake. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).