

The Vengeance of the Lord Jesus, Part 3

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

53-4

As we prepare ourselves for the Lord's Table, I want us to turn back to 2 Thessalonians, the very text that we have been studying, and look at verses 6 through 10 of chapter 1. Second Thessalonians chapter 1 verses 6 through 10. Paul writes: "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 and 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 on that day and to be marveled at among all who have believed. For our testimony to you was believed."

As we have noted now in this text over the last couple of weeks, the main theme is in verse 7: "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed." This text focuses on the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, that great moment when His feet touch the Mount of Olives, when He returns to set up His glorious kingdom, when His glory shall be revealed as never before. And when Jesus comes there will be a two-fold result, a two-fold effect. Verse 7 says He will come to give relief. And verse 8 says He will come to deal out retribution. The Lord Jesus is coming to bring peace, to bring joy, to bring blessedness, to bring eternal fullness to His people. He is coming to execute, to punish, to conquer, to give eternal hell to those who are not His people.

Those two extremes take place at the coming of Jesus Christ. As we have looked at the text, we have been identifying those two and doing our best to explain the significance of them. Last week we looked at retribution. Verse 8, Paul says the Lord Jesus is coming to deal out retribution. We saw that retribution means vengeance, that God is a God of vengeance. God will avenge those who have offended Him, who have rejected Him, who have rejected Jesus Christ, who have lived lives of sin, unforgiven sin. The word retribution also means punishment. It carries the idea of full vengeance and full punishment.

When Jesus comes in His glory to deal out retribution, the day of grace ends. Judgment sweeps across the world. We asked three questions about that. You'll remember them from last week. Question number one is why. Why does Jesus do this? Why does He come and deal out retribution? Verse 6 gives the answer. "After all, it is only just for God to repay with affliction." It is just, we said, it is consistent with the justice of God, God a holy God who must act in a just way, must punish unholiness. It is just. It is equitable. It is right. It is fitting.

Then we asked the question who. Who is going to feel this just retribution? And there in verse 6 it says, "Those who afflict you." That is, those who persecute Christians, those who mock or ridicule, those who in any way, shape or form demean, accuse, or persecute Christians. But they're part of a larger group identified over in verse 8 as those who do not know God and who do not obey the

gospel of our Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus will come, dealing out vengeance, dealing out punishment. That punishment will fall on all who have persecuted believers, who are part of a larger group who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

How was the third question. How is that vengeance, that retribution and that punishment to be meted out? First of all, in verse 6 it says, "God will repay with affliction." That means with pain. It will be a painful execution of judgment, of justice. Furthermore in verse 9, this penalty to be paid will be eternal. It will be an eternal pain, eternal destruction, he calls it. The word means ruination. In other words, man as to any value or any purpose or any worthiness will be ruined. It will be the ruination of that individual, eternally ruined and eternally to bear pain. Further, that is defined as being away from the presence of the Lord and away from the glory of His power. No evidence of the presence of God. He will not be there. No manifestation of the glory of His power. To be in that place called hell prepared for the devil and his angels is to be utterly apart from any representation of God or any display of His power whatsoever, left only to the underworld of fallen angels in their unmitigated, wickedness and punishment and unrelieved and eternal pain. That's retribution. That's what happens when Jesus comes.

But there's a second aspect. That aspect is the aspect of relief. And to that we look this morning. Verse 7 says that the Lord Jesus is coming to give relief. The word means rest, refreshment, restoration. He's coming to give us relief.

Now when you talk about relief or rest in the Scripture, there are three kinds of rest that are promised by God. The first is salvation rest, salvation rest. Jesus, in Matthew chapter 11, made that promise quite explicit. He said in 11, verses 28 and 29, "Come to Me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you shall find rest for your souls for My yoke is easy and My load, or My burden, is light."

What does He speak of? Talking to Jews, He knew they had a heavy burden. The heavy burden that the Jews bore was the burden of trying to do enough good works to earn salvation. That was their burden. That was an excruciating burden. And they were weary and they were heavy laden with the oppressing impossibility of doing enough righteous works to earn salvation. And Jesus says, "Come to Me and I'll give you rest." I'll give you salvation as a gift. I'll give it to you free. I'll give it to you by grace. You don't have to earn it. I'll take the burden, the intolerable burden of your effort away. That's salvation rest. Rest from any human effort to earn salvation. Rest from works righteousness attempts. It is that rest to which the writer of Hebrews refers when he says in Hebrews 4:9, "There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works."

When you enter into rest of salvation, you rest from your works, your fruitless, useless, religious efforts to save yourself, which is a heavy burden, more than anyone can bear, and when you come to Christ you rest from that. That's salvation rest. So there's a sense in which we already have relief. There's a sense in which we already have rest, salvation rest.

But what the apostle Paul has in mind here involves two other kinds of rest. The second kind of rest, in addition to salvation rest, is millennial rest. These last two of the three are future, millennial rest. He is saying when Jesus comes He is going to set up His kingdom. And in His kingdom there will be relief, there will be rest. Acts chapter 3 makes that very clear. In Acts chapter 3, as Peter is preaching, verse 19 he says, "Repent therefore and return that your sins may be wiped away in

order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, that He may send Jesus," the Second Coming, "the Christ appointed for you whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things."

What he's saying is when Jesus comes it will be a time of refreshing. When Jesus comes it will be a period of restoration of all things. In other words, paradise regained, the world the way God intended it and for a millennium. That's Latin really for a thousand years. For a thousand-year period there will be rest in the world. The lion will lie down with the lamb. A child will be able to play in a snake pit because the curse on the earth will be reversed. Natural enemies in the animal world will no longer be such. There will be blooming flowers in the desert. There will be streams of water running through the dry places. During the millennial kingdom there will be the establishment of the authority of Jesus Christ. Any rebel in the world, any sinful rebel will be dealt with immediately with a rod of iron. Any nation that is out of line will be crushed like a clay pot, so it says in Psalm 2, so it says in Revelation 2. Jesus Christ will rule and there will be perfect justice and perfect equity. And we will be there in that glorious kingdom. We'll be there in our glorified form, having already been changed. We will enter in to that millennial rest. We will know no pain. We will know no sorrow. We will know no sin. We will know no temptation. We will know no trials, no troubles, no persecution, no affliction of any kind for that thousand years. We will be relieved from fear, relieved from sin.

But there's a third kind of rest and that is eternal rest, for that thousand years is but the setting of the stage for the eternal rest which is ours forever and ever in the new heavens and the new earth. Revelation 14:13, "I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" 'Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest.'" That they may rest.

There is eternal rest. When you die you enter in to eternal rest. You enter into the presence of God, that is eternal rest and you will rest forever. Rest from any effort to...to gain salvation, obviously your salvation has already been gained. Rest from any battle with sin, any struggle with temptation, rest from any trials, tribulations, sorrows, anything, diseases, there will be none of that.

Today, here and now, for Christians we experience salvation rest, we rest from the heavy, unbearable, intolerable yoke of religious works trying to earn salvation. We take that yoke and we throw it off and we take the free gift of salvation. We rest. But we have yet to look forward to two kinds of rest. Some day we will die. If we die we enter into eternal rest and we'll come back to the world to enjoy that millennial rest. If we should live until the rapture, at that particular time we will be caught up with the Lord in the air, we will be transformed. We will come back to enter into His kingdom and then after the kingdom with all the other saints of all the ages we will enjoy eternal rest, as well.

So what is he saying in this text? He's saying when Jesus comes it means eternal rest. It means eternal relief. Forever and ever and ever you will be relieved of any affliction, any trouble, any trial. Life will be without trials. Imagine it, without problems, without sin, without temptation, pure bliss. That's the future, eternal relief.

Now that poses the same three questions. Why? Why would Jesus return to bring relief? Why would Jesus be so kind and so generous to people like us who are unworthy sinners? Why would He want to give us such an eternal gift? Eternal relief from any trouble of any kind? Why would He want to do that?

Back to verse 6, "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." It's only what? Just. And we're back to the same answer. It is justice. It is only just. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. God is just, Romans 3 says, and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus.

Do you understand that your eternal reward and your eternal relief is a matter of divine justice? It is right for God to do that. It is just for God to do that. Understanding the justice of God may not be easy for us. Let me see if I can't help by quoting from some paragraphs by A.W. Tozer. This is what he wrote. "Justice, when used of God, is a name we give to the way God is, nothing more. And when God acts justly, He is not doing so to conform to an independent criterion but simply acting like Himself in a given situation." Did you get that? When God acts He is just because He defines justice by what He does. He is not to conform to some independent standard of justice that is outside of Himself to which He must acquiesce. No, whatever He does is just because He's God and He's just. He defines justice.

Tozer goes on to say, "As gold is an element in itself and can never change nor compromise but is gold wherever it is found, so God is God always, only fully God and can never be other than He is. Everything in the universe is good to the degree it conforms to the nature of God and evil as it fails to do so. God is His own self-existent principle of moral equity and when He sentences evil men or rewards the righteous, He simply acts like Himself from within, uninfluenced by anything that is not Himself," end quote.

Now I know that's pretty deep theology but it's a very simple point. God sets His own standard for justice and He says I will punish the ungodly because it's just and I am the standard of justice, and I will reward the righteous and bring them relief because that is just as well.

Now you say, "Wait a minute, how can God be just and merciful at the same time?" Well first of all, understand that no attribute of God is ever at any point in time, not for a millisecond, in conflict with any other attribute of God. He is not a whole mass of attributes trying their best to work harmoniously. He is one. He is a unit. And He can act justly and still in perfect mercy. The solution for that problem, says Tozer, of how God can be just and still justify the unjust is found in the Christian doctrine of redemption. "It is that through the work of Christ in atonement, justice is not violated but satisfied. Redemptive theology teaches that mercy does not become effective toward man until justice has done its work. The just penalty for sin was exacted when Christ our substitute died for us on the cross," end quote.

God's justice said sin must be paid for. Christ fully paid the penalty. Justice was satisfied. God is merciful now to us and at the same time he is just. God says, "I will bring relief to the righteous, relief to those who know Me and love Me and obey My gospel. I will bring relief to My people because it is just. It is right." Why is it right? Because My demand for punishment has been satisfied and now justice allows Me to be merciful.

And so he says, does Paul, it is just. It is right. That's a marvelous thing to think about.

It isn't as if some day you're going to get into heaven and God's going to say, "Well, you don't deserve this, and I hope you know this isn't just and I hope you know that I'm sure bending the rules.

But I'm going to let you in because I'm just a good guy." You're going to go into heaven like something a million times greater than being knighted, with all the flurry of angelic welcome, with all the heavenly swords crisscrossed as you march in and God is going to announce, he enters because it is right. She enters because it is just. The due punishment for sin has been paid for, justice has been satisfied. And I cannot make this person pay again for what has already been paid. Justice admits to heaven. That's the meaning of the death of Christ. Particularly those of you who have put your faith in Jesus Christ, Paul would say, "Those of you who have suffered for the cause of Christ, those of you who have been maligned, who have endured courageously, who have suffered unjustly for the cause of Christ, know this that someday you will be repaid. And it is not only just to let you into heaven because Christ has paid the penalty for your sin, but is just for God to reward you and compensate you in kind somehow eternally for that which you have suffered here in this life." Your eternal reward will somehow be measured to compensate you, to recompense you for the degree of suffering you have endured in this life.

That's right. When James and John asked Jesus in Matthew 20 if they could sit on the right hand, or they had their mother go along and ask Him, the right hand of Christ in His kingdom, He said, "That's not for Me to give." And Jesus went on to say, "But I'll tell you what, that kind of elevation is for God to give and He gives it in proportion to the one who has suffered the most." Eternal reward is a recompense for affliction in this life for the cause of Christ. And God will repay. He will repay. It is just. It is just to let you in because your sins were justly paid for in Christ. It is just to reward you for what you suffered, not for your sake but for His sake. Whatever you suffered for His sake, He'll compensate you for. It is just.

Now that takes us then from the "why" to the "who." Who receives this eternal relief? Well verse 7, "You who are afflicted and to us as well." Now let me give you a footnote here. This is not to say that there is no relief here and now. This is not to say that we suffer here as Christians, we suffer maybe mockery, we suffer rejection. We may in some cases even suffer, some of us, persecution. It is not to say there is no compensation here. That's not so. First Peter 4 says that when you suffer for the cause of Christ for righteousness sake, the Spirit of grace and glory rests on you. James even says that you can count it all joy when you go through these things because they have a perfecting work in your life. Paul even found that when he was enduring the messenger from Satan who was the thorn in the flesh, that he found himself becoming so content with this trouble that he said, "I don't want to give it up because I have found in this kind of weakness I become powerful." So there's definitely some compensation here and now. Believers have power that's granted to them through their times of suffering. There is peace. There is sufficient grace. There is the Spirit of grace and glory resting on them. There is the joy of trials. There is the escalation of hope in their hearts. There is that deep-down satisfaction that says, "I am privileged to suffer for Christ who suffered for me." Paul says, I bear in my body the marks of Christ and for Him the signs of the whips and the rods and the stones were a source of joy because he took them on behalf of Christ. He said to...to the churches, "If I suffer and if I am afflicted, and if I die getting the gospel to you, it's a sweet death to me."

So there is compensation in this life. And I'm not intending to say that, nor is Paul. But the great relief, the great rest comes in the future. God will recompense those who bore His name, those who endured affliction, those who took the world's hostility and rejection because of Him.

Romans 8 puts it as pointedly and wonderfully as any text. Romans 8:17 says, "If we are children, children of God, then we are heirs, heirs of God. And if we are heirs of God then we must be fellow-heirs with Christ if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him." Then

verse 18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Any suffering we have here isn't even worthy to be compared with the compensating glory which awaits us in the future. Second Corinthians 4:17 says the same thing. Paul writes there, "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison. Whatever you suffer here is producing for you an eternal reward. We talk about heavenly rewards, that's what they are. Heavenly reward is recompense. It is paying back to the believer compensation for the suffering in this life only on an infinitely grander and more glorious indescribable and explicable scale.

Jesus said to the disciples, putting it in simple terms, "Fear not, little flock, you've got nothing to be afraid of. It's your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." You may suffer a little now, and be deprived. You aren't going to be deprived in the future.

And to who does this go...to whom? It says, "To those who are afflicted and to us as well." To those who are afflicted simply means Christians who suffer. Second Timothy 3:12 says, "All who live godly in the present age will suffer some persecution." So any Christian who is afflicted, any Christian who bears any reproach for Christ. Furthermore, he says, "To us as well." Not only to you Thessalonians, who are afflicted, but to us as well. And he's talking about himself, Paul. He's talking about Silvanus, or Silas who was with him. He's talking about Timothy. But I also think he's talking about believers in general. We're all going to be relieved. We're all going to experience it, all of us who have suffered for Christ and all of us together will be blessed. We'll all rest from our labors and receive our eternal reward.

So who gets this? Those who so boldly name the name of Christ that they were afflicted for it. Those who took their stand with Jesus Christ. You see, again, dear friend, you must understand that here you have eternal rest and eternal relief promised to people who suffered for Christ. That becomes then a definition of a believer. Someone who simply believes the facts of the gospel but never takes a stand for Christ, never bears the reproach of Christ, never names the name of Christ, never feels, as Shakespeare put it, the slings and the arrows, it's questionable whether they even truly are Christians. Eternal rest and eternal relief comes to those who have known the price of being a Christian, who counting the cost were willing, who took up their cross to follow Christ, who dropped, as it were, the plow and didn't look back, who willingly took His name and bore its reproach.

And the last question is how. How will we be rewarded? Verse 10, "When He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day and to be marveled at among all who believed; for our testimony to you was believed." Now let me explain this to you.

When He comes, *hotan*, whenever He comes, it's undefined, whenever He comes, and Paul is speaking in very general terms here, just looking at the end, not sorting out all the individual events, just looking at the coming of Christ. And he says, "Whenever He comes, on that day," certainly could be identified with the Day of the Lord, "two things are going to happen that are going to spell out your relief. Two things are going to spell out the rest that you receive. One, "He comes to be glorified in His saints." That's the first thing. That is an incredible thing. He comes to be fully glorified in His saints.

Now listen, you understand that this means that there will be a day when God will be glorified through us in a way that has never occurred before. Now you know also that in this life right here and now God wants to be glorified through us, right? First Corinthians 10:31, "Whatever you do, do all to

the glory of God, even if it's as simple as eating and drinking." Philippians 3 talks about God wanting glory in the church by Christ Jesus. We are to live to the praise of His glory. We're to let the glory of God be manifest through us.

In other words, we're to put God on display. To put it in the very clear terms of Jesus Himself in Matthew 5, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and (What?) glorify your Father who is in heaven." In other words, put God on display in the way you live. The glory of God is in us because Christ dwells in us. And He is the glory of God. John 1:14, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The glory of God, the presence of God, the essence of God, His attributes manifest in Christ, live in us to shine through us. That's what Paul says to the Corinthians. The light of the glorious reality of Christ is to shine through us. But the truth of the matter is, it's veiled, isn't it? It's hindered. And the glory... You see glimpses of it coming through us but it isn't unhindered, unmitigated full glory. We aren't there yet.

Paul in Romans 8 talks about the day when there will be the glorious manifestation of the children of God, the day when Jesus comes, the day when sin is gone, the day when temptation is gone, when sorrow and death are gone. The day when we become perfect, when we become holy and then the glory of God will shine through us unhindered. That's what heaven is. We read about the new Jerusalem and we read about the fact that the light of it is the glory of God and that it shines through that new Jerusalem with all of its jewels, blazing throughout the universe. Well we in a sense are like that. As that city is the capital city of heaven and, as it were, the temple of God, so we become the temple of God even as we are now only in that day without sin, without the debilitating human flesh, and the blazing glory of the reality of God will shine through us like transparent glass. To put it in the terms of Philippians 3, the words of Paul spell it out like this, "He will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory." We'll have a glorious body that will manifest the character of God living in us, dwelling in us.

To put it in the terms of the apostle John, he says in chapter 3 verse 2, "Beloved, now we are the children of God, but it hasn't appeared as yet what we will be." That's right. We're the children of God. You're a child of God. But if I just look at you, I don't necessarily see that. But the day will come when I will. "We know that when He appears we will be like Him because we'll see Him as He is." Now the glory is there, now we are the children of God, but it doesn't yet fully manifest itself.

What is heaven? What is our ultimate relief? Sin is gone and we become pure vehicles, pure vessels, instruments through which the glory of God shines, is displayed, mirrored, reflected. We even share that glory. That's what eternity is going to be. We just go through eternity with the glory of God moving through our perfect persons; perfect in body, perfect in spirit. We share the glory of Christ.

Secondly, this is equally as wonderful to think about. He says, "Not only will you be glorified as a saint, but you will be marveled at among all who have believed." You know what that means? All the rest of the saints are going to look at you and they're going to marvel, they're going to say, "Look what Bill has become. This is unbelievable." People in your family are going to see you and say, "This is...I can't handle this. This per...This is Joe, this is Sally, this is Nancy, this is Susie, look." You will be marveled at among all who have believed, the whole redeemed humanity in heaven are going to marvel at the glory that God moves through you.

So what is heaven? It is where you are the transparent, as it were, vehicle for the full glory of God,

and that's the personal experience of it. And then corporately gathered with all the other believers, you're marveling at what God has done to all of you.

So what do you have in heaven? Personal glory in you, manifesting the glory of God through your own self and that means... It means in the way that you serve throughout eternity and we'll all have some task, some duty, some responsibility in the way that you...you function within the plan and purpose of God in eternity. But secondly, not only will you have that personal role, but you will be absorbed in a corporate group of people who forever and ever will be praising God and praising God for what they see each other having become. That's heaven. That's the occupations of heaven. Personally serving God, manifesting His glory; corporately praising, worshiping, glorifying God for what He has made all of us to become. And you will see it more clearly, perhaps, in others than you will in yourself. And every time you see one who believed, one who has become glorified, you will praise God and praise God and praise God for the wonder, the beauty of what you've seen.

It can be simply maybe illustrated in a mundane way by the kind of thankfulness a Christian couple has to God when they bring a perfect little baby into the world and they look down into that little tender body with all of the right parts in the right place and all the sweet beauty of that untainted little life and they look at that thing and they thank God, and they thank God for what He has made, the beauty of what He has made, the tenderness of what He has made, the wonder of what He has made. Listen, that pales in the way that you're going to feel forever every time you see another glorified believer, because every time you see a believer, you're going to see one who is like Jesus Christ. And the wonder of it all will go on throughout all eternity. It will make a breathless kind of worship the norm forever.

Well the Thessalonians certainly didn't want to miss this. And lest any of them should be in fear, he adds at the end of verse 10, "For our testimony to you was believed." You'll be there with the believers. You're one of us. You'll be there. You believed. Your faith is real. And that's the deciding point, beloved. Paul said, "When we came to you and preached, you believed it. When we gave you the gospel, you believed it. You obeyed the gospel of the Lord Jesus, you know God. You will be included." He's promising them relief. The key is belief for relief; unbelief for retribution. The choice is yours.

Father, thank You for the hope, the thrill, the joy of anticipation as we think about what You've prepared for those that love You. We are overwhelmed and we are grateful. And, Lord, we know that it is all made possible by the cross and so it's so fitting as we think about what You've planned for us in the future that we now turn to the cross to thank You for that work done there in Christ which opens up to us that eternal promise of relief, from all trouble and all pain and all sorrow and moves us out of that retribution which is nothing but trouble, pain and sorrow forever. Lord, the crux of it all indeed is the cross and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who died and rose again. As we come now to Your table, may we come with thankfulness, oh such gratitude that Jesus died for us and that You granted us the gift of salvation in Him. We thank you. May we celebrate His death with a new-found joy and gratitude.

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