

Series: **Confident Hope**
Today's Title: **"Our Relief in God's Vengeance"**

June 19, 2022 – 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12 – Sermon 21 of 28

Father's Day!!!

Objective: To give Christians relief that God will judge evil and we will enter eternal rest with Him.

It is interesting...and maybe you will agree with me.

This is not from some polling data or broad-based study, but simply my anecdotal observation over the years.

When people think of God, they often think of Him being angry – eager to judge – intolerant, etc.

When people think of Jesus, they often think of a very kind, gentle man who was passive, soft-spoken, accepting, encouraging, non-judgmental, gracious, and merciful.

These impressions and assumptions people make are based more on cultural trends and movie depictions, not Scripture.

If someone grew up going to church, their thoughts about God – and Jesus – are often shaped by their church experience and their exposure to the Old or New Testament.

If someone is only familiar with the O.T., they might come away with a picture of God's wrath and anger toward sin.

Granted, this is a partial view of what the O.T. says about God, but this is a popular view of the God of the O.T.

If someone is only familiar with the New Testament, they probably come away with a more favorable view of Jesus / of God.

This view of God which varies depending on what testament someone is reading is a failure to understand what they are reading.

It's a failure to understand the difference between the Old and the New Covenant.

It's a failure to understand the difference between Israel and the Church.

It's a failure to understand the difference between the Law and grace.

Let's get to a more important question.

What is your view of God?

- Do you believe God is a just God – a holy God?
- Do you believe He is a God who keeps His promises?
- Do you believe He is a God who is righteous and will judge every sin and right every wrong?

Turn to 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12 – p. 989

As we discussed last Sunday, the Thessalonian Christians were hyper-growing in their faith.

As a result, their love for others was increasing, and they were steadfast – remaining strong in their faith as they were enduring persecution and afflictions.

That's what the first 4 verses of chapter 1 covered.

But when a Christian is persecuted – when they suffer because of their faith – suffer because they are doing what is good and holy, ***it can feel very lonely.***

It can feel as if God is not paying attention – that He is not concerned with your pain.

It can feel as if you're by yourself.

These feelings are what leads so many Christians to doubt God – to question His attentiveness or awareness of their situation.

It may lead to them wondering if God even cares.

These are not new feelings or thoughts.

The people of God have always struggled with these thoughts and cried out to God for Him to do something – to vindicate them – bring justice to evildoers!

Various psalmists wrote about these struggles in what we call the **Imprecatory Psalms.**

These are Psalms that speak a curse toward the enemies of God, not a blessing.

As they were suffering – or had suffered – they cried out to God to return the favor – to do to their enemies what their enemies did to them.

These were prayers for God to render His justice – to rescue them from their oppression, and to protect them from future acts of evil.

Psalm 79

Psalm 137

Revelation 6:9-10 (Tribulation period)

When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.

They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before You will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

This is the Christian desire in suffering and persecution.

The desire for justice – to see God’s name honored – His people protected – for evil to be judged.

The desire for relief - protection – for safety – for peace, ***shalom*** in every area of life.

As we look at the lawless and godless tone and attitude of our culture, we wonder how long until God puts a stop to it.

How long will He allow children to be abused and lied to about who they are and how God created them?

How long will He allow the murder of unborn babies to continue?

How long will He allow a culture to live in prosperity who knows about Him, but rejects Him?

How long will He allow churches to continue who claim the name of Jesus, yet reject His teachings?

Thankfully, we are not experiencing the persecution and afflictions that the Thessalonian believers were enduring.

But we have similar concerns and thoughts as to God's posture and action in the midst of what is going on around us.

We have similar concerns and thoughts regarding the judgment and justice of God on the evil we see.

We have similar concerns and thoughts about how long God will wait before He puts a stop to evil and protects His children with peace.

Opening Prayer

Follow along as I read **1:5-12**.

The return of Jesus will be to judge, not save. vs. 7b-9

The 1st advent of Jesus was to offer salvation - to offer help – to offer forgiveness and love as He healed the sick and demon-possessed and taught the crowds about the heart of God for sinners.

As the Apostle John wrote in his gospel...

John 3:17

“God sent His Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through Him.”

Jesus was born so He could reveal the Father to us – and to give His life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

He was incarnate to be the Savior of the world.

But when He returns – at His 2nd advent, He will come as judge.

He will return as King to right all wrongs and rule His kingdom.

Read vs. 7-9

“...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might...”

You have probably heard the term ‘apocalypse’.

It refers to the end – to God’s judgement at the end of time – to a great disaster.

Normally, when Paul speaks of Jesus’ return, he uses the term *Parousia* – which means ‘coming’.

Here, he uses the term *apokalupsis* – which means ‘revealed’ or ‘unveiling’.

At the first advent of Christ – when He was born in Bethlehem – and grew up in Nazareth – then ministered throughout the nation of Israel, His true nature was hidden - only known by a small number of people.

But when He returns, He will be fully revealed – fully unveiled.

vs. 7b - “...when the Lord Jesus is revealed (*apokalupsis*) from heaven...”

He first came as a Savior.

His 2nd coming will be as Judge and King.

He's coming "from heaven", which not only makes sense since He ascended to Heaven, but "from heaven" carries with it authority – divine authority.

Jesus has heavenly authority to come back as Judge over all humanity.

Why does Jesus come back in this way?

Why doesn't He just take believers up to Heaven – and then wrap up history some other way?

Why not fix things – right all the wrongs – through human rulers – like He's done throughout history?

This passage tells us 2 reasons for His return:

1) Retribution (which we'll talk about next week).

2) Relief

The return of Jesus will give Christians relief from evil and injustice. vs. 6-8

During our hot summers, when I work outside – or in the garage, the heat can be oppressive.

It can wear you out quickly.

When I need a break, I go inside – into the air-conditioned house – and get something cold to drink.

Relief from the heat.

I can relax – enjoy the cool air – rest.

It's one thing to get relief from the summer heat.

It's another thing to get relief from those who persecute and afflict you for your faith.

This is what the Thessalonians were enduring.

Paul has comforted them by telling them Jesus will return and when He does, He will judge those who are afflicting them.

Persecuted Christians can take solace knowing those who afflict them will be afflicted by God!

But the return of Jesus will also bring much needed "relief" to His followers.

6 "...since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you,

7 and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels

8 in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."

"relief" – Gr. *anesis* = rest, loosening, relaxation, freedom, indulgence

Think of rest in the largest, broadest sense you can imagine.

Eternal rest.

The writer of Hebrews (chapter 4) looks back to the Exodus generation – those who God redeemed from slavery in Egypt – led them through the wilderness and after 18 months brought them to the Promised Land – the land of rest.

But they were rebellious – they refused to believe and trust in God.

Instead, they longed for the days of Egypt – the days of slavery. As a result, that generation never entered the land of rest.

They died in the wilderness, never receiving the promised rest God wanted to provide.

The writer of Hebrews then writes of salvation rest for those who believe in Jesus – meaning they can rest from trying to earn God’s favor.

We who believe in Jesus as our Savior can rest right now in the grace and mercy of God.

But there is yet a Sabbath Rest he writes about – a future rest that we will enter someday.

Christian – you and I have a current rest in Jesus, but we also have a future rest in heaven.

That is an important truth to keep in your mind – to have as a foundation for our faith and hope as we look to the future.

Back to our passage...

The “relief” Paul mentions in **vs. 7** is a rest / relief from affliction.

Rest from affliction / rest from persecution – rest from the temptation of our soul.

This “relief” begins at the rapture of the Church.

1 Thess. 4:16-18

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

Jesus speaking to His disciples - John 14:3

“I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also.”

Not only will Jesus return as Judge and bring justice to evil – right to every wrong.

But His return will bring us the relief we all long for.

vs. 7 – “...to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven...”

Part of this relief will be in knowing those who have afflicted us will be afflicted by God.

The other part is the relief we will have from this world of sin and pain. Those who afflicted will no longer be able. We will enter our Heavenly Rest – where there will be no more sin, sorrow, pain, or loss.

You might be unhappy at this point – because so far, all the answers to persecution and the many afflictions in this life are all in the future.

When Jesus returns.

But what about now?

How can we be comforted now?

Is there anything that can help me understand my suffering and see how it fits into the larger plan of God?

Yes!

There is a purpose to the Christian's suffering. vs. 5, 11-12

In these verses, Paul lays out the purpose – the reason God allows His children to suffer and endure afflictions.

When I have trouble – afflictions – problems – I want them out of my life. I don't like these things!

But God uses these things to make me better – more like His Son.

There are 3 phrases I want to focus on in this point.

vs. 5 – “that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God...”

vs. 11 – “that our God may make you worthy of His calling...”

vs. 12 – “so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you...”

How we understand this comes down to the first word in

vs. 5 – “This”.

What is “This” connected to? What is it referring to?

Answer: It points back to **vs. 4** – “...your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.”

The Apostle says, “This is...the righteous judgment of God” – which at first glance seems problematic – to say that the

“persecutions” and “afflictions” the Thessalonians are “enduring” are a “righteous judgment of God”.

But remember, God uses all things for His good.

All things for good – even evil things (See Genesis 50:20).

James 1:2-3

“Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy.

For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.

So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.”

This is a theology of suffering.

This is how we look at and understand suffering from a divine perspective – from God’s perspective.

Persecution and suffering are used by God to strengthen and deepen our faith and to bring us to greater maturity in our faith.

It’s a sign that we are living for Christ and not for the world or for ourselves.

It’s a sign that we are His – and others can see we are His!

This is why we read in...

Acts 5:41

“The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus.”

The purpose of Christian suffering?

- To mold us further into the image of Christ.

- To develop a perseverance in our faith – a faith that is steadfast – immovable – no matter what.
- To make us more Christ-like – more worthy of the calling and birthright we received through grace.
- For Jesus to be glorified in us – by how we respond to pain and persecution.

Apply it...

Jesus will return to judge.

Don't delay – put your faith in Jesus right now!

We will have relief when Jesus returns.

Relief that evil people will get what they deserve!

Relief from sin, evil, and persecution.

Embrace the divine purpose of your suffering and pain.

Jesus had compassion when He saw the crowds.

It Is Well with My Soul Lyrics

When peace like a river, attendeth my way,

When sorrows like sea billows roll

Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say

It is well, it is well, with my soul

It is well

With my soul

It is well, it is well with my soul

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,

Let this blest assurance control,

That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul

It is well (it is well)

With my soul (with my soul)

It is well, it is well with my soul

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought

My sin, not in part but the whole,

Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, o my soul

It is well (it is well)

With my soul (with my soul)

It is well, it is well with my soul

It is well (it is well)

With my soul (with my soul)

It is well, it is well with my soul

Close in prayer