

April 18, 2021
Sunday Evening Service
Series: 2 Thessalonians
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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GOD WILL REPAY
2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

Some of the great classic stories are about revenge. For example, there is Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Or a couple of novels by Alexandre Dumas, *The Man in the Iron Mask*, and one of my favorites, *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Stories like these focus on payback for wrong doing, a favorite and seemingly justifiable vice of human nature.

Of course someone who has read the Bible might be quick to correct me and point out that David, that man of God's own choosing, seemed to be pretty vengeful according to several of the psalms he wrote. For example, David prayed regarding wicked men, *Make them bear their guilt, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; because of the abundance of their transgressions cast them out, for they have rebelled against you (Psalm 5:10)*. Of course that was a prayer for vengeance on God's enemies. A similar prayer for vengeance against the wicked is, *Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup (Psalm 11:6)*. But then again, David prayed the same way against his own enemies. *All my enemies shall be ashamed and greatly troubled; they shall turn back and be put to shame in a moment (Psalm 6:10)*. That sounds a little more personal.

We must keep in mind that even when we find statements like this that request God's vengeance, it is still obvious that vengeance is reserved for God. One reminder of that truth that I consider often is Moses' promise regarding God's people. Some of his last words from God to His people were, "*Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly.*" For the LORD will vindicate

his people and have compassion on his servants, when he sees that their power is gone and there is none remaining, bond or free" (Deuteronomy 32:35-36).

All such statements stand on this simple foundation stated by Paul: *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Romans 12:19)*. That same statement is found in Hebrews 10:30. God's people must always turn any thought of vengeance over to Him.

God's prerogative of vengeance against sin and sinners is the point of our text. At this place in Paul's letter to young Christians in Thessalonica, Paul taught them to wait patiently on God who will repay. Those young Christians were humans just like we are. They surely struggled with thoughts of payback against the people who were persecuting them. But the Scripture taught them and reminds us that payback is not our responsibility.

God keeps the records. God knows when, how, and how much His people are mocked, lied about, criticized, and harmed physically. Sometimes God pays back the wicked sinners in this life. Ultimately, the persecutors will get their due when Christ returns in fiery judgment. God has a law of sowing and reaping that works as certainly as His laws of inertia and gravity. I believe it was Adrian Rogers who stated the law like this: You will reap what you sow. You will reap after you sow. You will reap more than you sow. Every farmer knows how that principle works. It would be good for sinners to be aware of that principle before they sow seeds of trouble against God's people.

Present Suffering (vv.5-6).

Suffering is evidence of God's righteousness. That seems like an odd conclusion. But that is what the text teaches. *This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering (v.5)*. In God's righteousness His people suffer. Is that really true? Yes. The conclusion turns on the meaning of "this." The definition or identification of "this" is found in the previous verse from which our text flows. *Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches*

of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring (2 Thessalonians 1:4).

We would like for the text to say that God's promise of repaying the sinners who afflict His people is evidence of God's righteous judgment. In fact, that is true according to the latter part of our text. But that is not the most accurate interpretation for this statement in verse five. Here we are looking at evidence God used to come to the right conclusion. Because God is altogether righteous, yes, the standard of righteousness, He has to come to the right conclusion. God will always decide in perfect accord with what is right and act accordingly.

The evidence that God is always right is found in the reality that God allows His people to suffer. That truth is hard for us, the people of God, to swallow. We don't gravitate toward suffering. Our human nature seeks comfort, pleasure, ease, and acceptance. It seems like the sign of the true child of God in our day is that he or she is happy, middle/upper class, professional, involved in the community, with lots of friends, and wholly acceptable to sinners who hate Jesus (and yet talk kindly about Him).

That is not the description we find of God's people from Genesis through the Revelation. God's people suffer because we are God's people living in Satan's world. If we are conforming to right as God is right, we are going to rub sinners the wrong way and they are often going to let us know. In our culture especially this agitation comes in the simplest forms such as the way we talk, the way we dress, the common practices we practice.

But more accurately, this statement also reveals that God's righteousness demonstrates our worthiness for kingdom citizenship. We are made worthy to be citizens of God's kingdom only through the sacrifice of Christ. When we confess our sins, repent, and trust Christ's finished work alone for salvation, God sanctifies us—sets apart to Himself. God is altogether right to set us apart because Jesus bought that pardon through His blood. Being set apart for God's glory and purposes will definitely cause us to swim upstream in this world. That we are suffering, that we no longer fit in a sinful world is evidence of God's righteous work of salvation.

No one likes to be a misfit, an outsider, or unacceptable. So, what if all the happy people, all the acceptable people, all the popular

folks are jumping in the Niagra River somewhere in the vicinity of Tonawanda? They are all shouting and laughing. Many are floating on rafts and inner tubes, lifting their beers and cocktails in toasts to the levity of life. Are you going to jump in with them? Are you going to do everything possible to be like them? Your Father specifically told you to stay away from the Niagra River at that spot because it is swift and dangerous and you will almost certainly get swept into the current. Maybe you could just get into the water knee deep. That would be okay, right? That way you could kind-of obey your Father but also be acceptable to happy people who have so much fun. Besides if you don't get in the water, the happy people are going to mock you. The problem is that none of the happy people are aware that Niagra Falls is less than four miles down river. Sure people have talked about it. And the people who listen to their Father have warned the careless people about the falls. But the happy people really don't believe it. At least not yet.

The same righteousness of God that allows His people to suffer also repays those who afflict, *since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you (v.6).*

This is a statement of the principle of retribution for sin. From the beginning of time God warned of retribution. God's promise to repay sin is immutable. In paradise, in perfection, God warned Adam that disobedience regarding the tree of knowledge would result in death. It seems impossible that God could have made the rule any clearer. The problem was that Eve and Adam didn't trust God and it resulted in disobedience, which had to result in retribution. And so we all die.

From that point on in human history, the Bible is full of God's warnings that He will repay sinners in full. God's chosen servants like Abraham through Moses reiterated the warning. Multiple Old Testament prophets, God's messengers, warned and warned about divine retribution against sin. And God's people were more obtuse than Adam. God even sent angels on occasion to warn mere humans about coming retribution. It didn't matter and the people still would not listen.

The Bible does not simply record God's warnings, but also records how and when God carried out His promises about judging sin. The Old Testament examples of God's payment for sin run the

gamut from Cain to Belshazzar. In the New Testament, we read about God pouring out retribution on sinners from King Herod to Antichrist.

But let's quickly review the problem in Job. Not all apparent judgment is God's retribution against an individual's sin. Job's friends and counselors were absolutely convinced that Job was guilty of sin which brought God's punishment upon him. They did not understand that all trials and tribulations are not indications of God's judgment against sin. They did not understand the psalmist's conclusion: *I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me (Psalm 119:75)*. But, Job's problem aside, the fact remains that God will repay sin.

The timing of retribution is also important. Sometimes God repays sin in this life. It can be in the form of sickness, financial loss, any number of setbacks. Solomon concluded, *Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy (Proverbs 28:13)*. God's payback in this life can even be a matter of death. John warned, *If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life – to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that (1 John 5:16)*.

Ultimately, sin will reap its reward in eternity. Every sinner will give an account for and be sentenced because of his or her sinful works. Jesus taught a very serious lesson about this. *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the*

winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it” (Matthew 7:21-27).

Jesus built on that warning with the revelation He gave to John. *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15)*.

Even Christians will be rewarded and not rewarded because of failure. Here is an important truth for us believers: *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil (2 Corinthians 5:10)*.

Also, this is true. *For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw – each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire (1 Corinthians 3:11-15)*.

The young Christians in Thessalonica needed to keep God's plan of retribution in mind even while they endured persecution.

Future Payment (vv.7-10).

The Lord will return to inflict vengeance (vv.7-8). For Christians that is good news that Jesus will come to grant relief. He is coming *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 (v.7).

This is not a reference to the *parousia*. That is the word Paul used in the first letter (4:15) to speak of *the coming of the Lord*. In that amazing event, all the living Christians and the bodies of those who have trusted Christ but died will be caught up to be with Christ forever. Here the word is “revealed” (*apokalupsis*) which gives us the English word apocalypse.

The New Testament usage of this word speaks of the uncovering, the revelation, the unveiling of last time events. Because that uncovering is associated with the events described in the Revelation, modern culture has in some venues become obsessed with the apocalypse. In movies and books an apocalyptic event is utter chaos, sheer terror, death and dismemberment to the extreme. Well, actually, this time the dreamers in Hollywood at least came close to the truth.

But the chief point of the “revelation,” that is the apocalypse, is Jesus’ return to earth to establish His kingdom. Many times and by many prophets, God promised that He will restore the kingdom of Israel in an idyllic kingdom. Isaiah promised that in the new kingdom, “*The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,*” says the LORD (Isaiah 65:25). Jesus’ return to establish His kingdom will require the removal of sinners from the earth at that time. This is when Jesus is going to take the world back from Satan the usurper and rule it Himself. Satan will be bound for a thousand years and Christ with His army will purge the world of sinners. It will not be a pretty sight. It will make the imaginations of Hollywood look like child’s play.

Paul promised that, in that day, Jesus will come inflicting vengeance. He will come *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 (v.8)*. Jesus’ judgment will be characterized by flaming fire. As we well know, fire can consume and destroy. But Scripture often uses fire as a form of judgment, a way of purging dross out of precious metals so that only the valuable is left.

This flaming fire will wreak God’s vengeance on real people. They are people who do not have a relationship with God through

faith in Christ. They might even talk about God a good bit. But there is no relationship. Remember from our previous reference to Matthew 7 that Jesus will say, “I never knew you.” Jesus knows everything and everyone. But Jesus does not have a relationship with everyone.

Furthermore, these people are described as people who do not OBEY the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They might know the principles of the gospel very well. They might even be able to quote the Roman’s road. But salvation from sin, the coming vengeance of God is not a matter of knowing the gospel – it is a matter of doing the gospel. How does one “do” the gospel? You believe what God says about yourself and Jesus. You say the same thing about yourself that God says. You turn around by laying down your arms of rebellion against God and taking up His case against yourself. You rest in His promises. Many very religious people who are very familiar with the gospel will be destroyed by the vengeance of Christ’s flaming fire.

The Lord’s return will be bittersweet (vv.9-10). On one hand, it will mean utter, eternal punishment for unbelievers. *They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might (v.9)*. The ultimate punishment is eternal destruction. This is the picture Jesus gave in Matthew 25:32 of the Good Shepherd separating the sheep from the goats. “*Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left*” (Matthew 25:32-33). That is a scary scene because in the end, “*He will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’*” (Matthew 25:41). That sentence will be carried out when these people who are killed will be resurrected to stand before the Great White Throne.

The worse part of the eternal judgment is that the sinners will be removed from the presence and mighty glory of the Lord. We cannot even imagine what it would be like to live apart from God’s common grace. It will be sheer terror forever!

But what a contrast that at the same event it will mean glorification for all who believe. *When he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed (v.10)*. In that same setting of vengeful destruction, the Lord Jesus will receive glory

in His people. All who have trusted Jesus for salvation will marvel, they will be awestruck with utter amazement. The difference is as simple as believing the testimony of the gospel witnesses.

The basic truth of reward for obedience and punishment for disobedience is the law of God. Life is made up of a series of choices and none is more important than this one. Are you floating on the Niagra River unconcerned about pending destruction? Are you dipping your foot in the river contrary to your Father's warning? The day of His vengeance is coming. Obey, love, honor your Lord now so that you can rejoice on payday.