

## Message #4

## II Thessalonians 1:5-10

Back in the year A.D. 325, there was a major church council meeting that took place at Nicea, which is modern day Isnik, in Turkey. Over 300 church leaders gathered to form a doctrinal statement about Jesus Christ that was true to Scripture. A heretic by the name of Arius had attacked the Deity of Jesus Christ and at this council meeting he and his friends were denounced. Now according to one historical account, there were 318 delegates at this meeting and of the 318 delegates, only about 12 had not lost an eye, or hand, or had a limp in their leg because of experiencing some form of torture. In other words, almost all of the leaders of the church had some physical problem because they had literally and physically suffered for Jesus Christ.

Now when you are suffering, it is very comforting to know that someone is watching over you. We could all testify of the fact that when someone who is in a hospital wakes up and sees someone in the room checking on them or watching over them, it is soothing to the soul.

This Thessalonian church was a relatively new church when Paul wrote these letters. Paul loved this church and he loved the people in this church. It had a right focus. The people here were dedicated to understanding God's Word, including the deep doctrines pertaining to biblical prophecy. But it didn't take long until this church came under a satanic attack. Primarily, false religious people were verbally and physically attacking this church and the people in it. One man from the church whose name was Jason, was hauled into court because he had housed Paul and his team. They dragged him and some other church members before the city authorities and they had to pay a fine to keep from further punishment (Acts 17:6-9).

Since Paul had left the city, things had not gotten any better. The religious Jews of Thessalonica tracked Paul all the way to Berea and then they went back to Thessalonica and started attacking the church. Paul wanted these Thessalonians to realize someone was watching and it was God. Not only was God watching, He was recording and ultimately He would punish those who did evil. The point here is this:

**BELIEVERS WHO ARE SUFFERING MAY BE COMFORTED IN KNOWING THAT GOD IS WATCHING AND HE WILL GIVE RELIEF AND REWARD TO HIS PEOPLE AND VENGEFUL REPAYMENT AND PUNISHMENT TO THOSE WHO CAUSED THE SUFFERING.**

Paul needed to write some encouragement to these hurting believers so they could continue to persevere. Now the suffering that they were actually experiencing was due to their faith in Jesus Christ. It was not due to the fact that they had made ridiculous decisions. If we suffer because we are doing wrong, we deserve to suffer and there is no eternal value to it. But these believers were suffering because they had embraced grace.

Now there are three explanations that Paul presents to the Thessalonians as to why they are suffering:

**EXPLANATION #1** – When believers suffer for their faith in Jesus Christ, it actually demonstrates their worthiness to share in God’s kingdom. **1:5**

The phrase “the kingdom of the God” (της βασιλειας του θεου) refers to a very specific kingdom. In other words, Paul had a specific kingdom in mind. This is not a generic reference to God’s kingdom program. He is not referring here to going to heaven at the Rapture. The thing he had in mind, which is contextually proved in the following verses, is the moment when Jesus Christ returns to establish His millennial kingdom reign on this earth. He talked about this same event in Romans 8:18-23, where he said all creation suffers and waits for this moment.

Now let us be very clear on this point. **Our worthiness to enter God’s heaven or God’s kingdom is due to God’s grace and is by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.** The thing that qualifies us for heaven and God’s kingdom is not our suffering, it is our faith. So this verse is not teaching you go to heaven by suffering.

**This verse is designed to show that there is a purpose for suffering and that purpose is to manifest who is worthy to reign with Christ when He establishes His kingdom.**

In Greek, the phrase “to be considered worthy” is a purpose clause (εις το plus infinitive). So one purpose of suffering is to establish which believers will be considered worthy to reign with Jesus Christ when He establishes His kingdom. When we remain committed and faithful and loyal to God when suffering, we actually put ourselves on a path that will enable us to reign with Jesus Christ during His millennial reign.

**Paul taught in other places that believers who are faithful in suffering will not only be in the kingdom, but will actually reign with Jesus Christ in it (II Tim. 2:12).** So his point here is that if you remain faithful to the Lord when suffering, this is a plain indication that when you face the judgment of God, you will be considered to be worthy to reign with Jesus Christ when he establishes His kingdom. **It is only right and just that one would get to reign with Jesus Christ when one was willing to suffer for Jesus Christ.**

When Jesus was here on earth, He taught His own disciples that when they were persecuted for His sake, they could rejoice because their reward in heaven was great (Matt. 5:11, 12; Luke 6:22-23).

Knowing that is comforting.

**EXPLANATION #2** – When believers suffer for their faith, it is important for them to know that God will eventually give relief. **1:7a**

Now the word “relief” (ανεσις) means that God specifically promises that when His people are suffering for their faith, God will relieve the pressure. He will loosen up the suffering (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 36). God will never give one more than he is capable of bearing.

What is specifically promised is that God will ease off the pressure to those who are afflicted. That word “afflicted” (τοις θλιβομενοις) is an articular, present tense participle. The word specifically refers to those who find themselves in a distressful, oppressive, narrow, tight spot (*Ibid.*, p. 207). The article “the” specifically refers to believers who find themselves in this spot because of their relationship with God.

God is specifically promising His people who are suffering because of their stand for His grace that He will give them relief. It is so good to know that God is watching out for His own.

**EXPLANATION #3** – When believers suffer for their faith, it is important for them to know that God will eventually repay with vengeance those who caused the suffering. **1:6-10**

God wanted these Thessalonians to realize that He was keeping the record and in the future, because of His justice, He would punish those causing the suffering and He would give relief to those suffering.

Now the full outworking of this, in its totality, will be when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire (**1:7b**). **This is not referring to the Rapture. This is a reference to Christ’s second coming that will occur at the end of the Tribulation when He comes back to this earth to establish His kingdom reign.**

Now there are at least 13 major differences between the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ:

1. At the Rapture, Jesus Christ will come in the air. I Thess. 4:16-17  
At the Second Coming, Jesus Christ will come to the earth. Zech. 14:4
2. At the Rapture, Jesus Christ will come secretly for His church. I Thess. 4:16-17  
At the Second Coming, Jesus Christ will come openly with His church. I Thess. 3:13; Jude 14
3. At the Rapture, all believers will leave the earth. I Thess. 4:16-17  
At the Second Coming, all unbelievers will leave the earth. Matt. 24:37-41
4. At the Rapture, Jesus Christ comes to get His bride. II Cor. 4:14; Eph. 5:25-27; Mt. 25:1-13  
At the Second Coming, Jesus Christ comes back with His bride. Rev. 19:7
5. At the Rapture, Jesus Christ gathers His own. I Thess. 4:16-17  
At the Second Coming, angels gather His elect. Mt. 24:31
6. At the Rapture, Jesus Christ comes to reward. I Thess. 4:17; Rev. 22:12  
At the Second Coming, Jesus Christ comes to judge. Matt. 25:31-46

7. The Rapture is not found in the Old Testament. I Cor. 15:51  
The Second Coming is often predicted in the Old Testament. Dan. 7:13-14; Zech. 14:1, 4
8. The Rapture contains no imminent signs. I Thess. 5:1  
The Second Coming is preceded by many specific signs. Mt. 24:4-29; Rev. 6-19
9. The Rapture is a time of blessing and comfort. I Thess. 4:18  
The Second Coming is a time of destruction and judgment. II Thess. 1:4-9; 2:8-12
10. The Rapture is only for believers. Jn. 14:1-3; I Cor. 15:51-55; I Thess. 4:13-18  
The Second Coming is for Israel and Gentile nations. Mt. 24:1-25:46
11. The Rapture occurs in the blink of an eye and only believers will see it. I Cor. 15:51-52  
The Second Coming will be very visible to the entire world. Mt. 24:27; Rev. 1:7
12. The Rapture begins the Tribulation. Rev. 6  
The Second Coming ends the Tribulation and begins the Millennium. Rev. 20:4
13. At the Rapture, Jesus Christ comes as the Bright Morning Star—which emphasizes grace.  
Rev. 22:16  
At the Second Coming, Jesus Christ comes as the Sun of Righteousness—which emphasizes judgment. Mal. 4:2

Now what Paul says to the Thessalonians in **verse 6** is there will come a day when God will settle the score for His people. He will repay those who did wrong to His people. He will give “affliction” to those who caused “affliction.” That word “affliction” (θλιψις) means that God will repay all of the trouble, distress and pressure that was put on His people. The word “repay” (ανταποδιδωμι) is one that refers to an unfavorable, complete equivalent recompense (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 40).

The infinitive is aorist tense, which means this refers to a specific moment of time in which Jesus Christ gives a complete negative payment to those who pressured His people. That specific moment is spelled out in **verse 7**, when He returns in all of His glory. He will come in “blazing fire” and we will come with Him and watch Him pour out His vengeance.

So here is what I understand all of this to mean—God will relieve the pressure from His people and He will pay back those who did evil against them, and the specific time when He will make the complete payback payment will be when He returns.

In fact, **verse 8** says that when He returns, He will deal out retribution justice on those who do not know God and did not obey the Gospel and believe on Jesus Christ.

Now there are two classes of people on whom God will pour out His wrath. These are two kinds of people who make things difficult for God's people and most of the people described here are religious:

**Class #1** - God will pour out His wrath on those who are ignorant of God. **1:8a**

Most religious people are ignorant of God. Religious people don't want to hear that, but this is true. The participle "do not know" is perfect tense. What that means is that there was a point of time when these people did perceive and had knowledge of and saw truth, but they refused it. They refused to know truth and decided to stay in their religious ignorance.

Every human being is born with an intuitive knowledge of God. God has programmed that into every single human being (Romans 1:19). God's creation testifies of His eternal power and divine nature. But most people suppress this truth and they remain foolish and their hearts remain dark. They choose to stay ignorant of God. One day God will pay them back.

**Class #2** - God will pour out His wrath on those who refused to respond to the Gospel. **1:8b**

The participle "obey" means that these people heard the truth and listened to the truth about their need to believe on Jesus Christ, but they would not answer the truth that was knocking at the door of their heart (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 456). The present tense indicates that these people continually heard the truth of Jesus Christ and continually rejected it.

Both groups of people, "the religiously ignorant" and the "gospel rejecters" lived in Thessalonica and made life miserable for the believers. Both groups have no excuse and God will target both groups with His wrath because they mistreated His people.

Now in **verse 9**, Paul specifically describes the judgment and destructive penalty that both of these classes of people will experience:

**(Penalty #1)** - They will suffer eternal destruction. **1:9a**

This is the most expressive statement in all of Paul's epistles about the future eternal punishment that will be given to those who reject God's grace. They will receive an eternal payment of eternal destruction.

That word "destruction" is scary. It is a word that speaks of a deadly, destructive sentence of ruin and death. It is qualified with an adjective "eternal." That word means without end. What this word means is that there will never be a chance of a moment of time in which the status will change.

So what Paul was saying is that those who remain ignorant of God and reject the Gospel are heading to an eternal condemnation that will be destructive to them forever and ever. They will receive the eternal death penalty.

**(Penalty #2)** - They will be forever removed from the presence of the Lord. **1:9b**

Now it is not enough that these people receive this deadly sentence of hell, but also they will be removed forever from the presence of the Lord. Unbelievers will eventually have no accessibility at all to even the presence of God.

Why would God want these people in His presence? They lived their entire lives not interested in God, His Word or His Gospel. They had the privilege of enjoying many wonderful things because of the presence of God. But in eternity those things will be gone.

**(Penalty #3)** - They will be forever removed from the glory of His power. **1:9c**

I understand this to mean that they will be removed from ever seeing anything that displays the glory and power of God. They did not want a true relationship with God through Jesus Christ, so God will see to it that they justly receive an eternity in which there is no relationship with God and no expression of His great glory.

Now in **verse 10**, Paul again stresses the fact that this will all happen when Jesus Christ returns with all of His saints. He will be glorified “in” His saints, not “by” His saints. In other words, at His return all of His saints reflect His glory and all believers of all ages will marvel at the glory of Jesus Christ.

When Paul says this will all happen on “that day,” it is clearly a reference to the day Jesus Christ comes back to earth with all of His saints. He will reign with His saints for 1000 years and then there will come the Great White Throne judgment at the end of the Millennium.

It is interesting the final clause of **verse 10**, “for our testimony to you was believed.” What this tells us is that Paul had taught these Thessalonians much about biblical prophecy and they believed it and they got it. When Paul taught these Thessalonians, there was “rapid growth” (i.e. 3:1) the likes of which he had not seen before.

### **Two concluding thoughts:**

- 1) If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, be comforted in knowing God is watching over you and He will relieve the pressure and will reward you for faithfulness.
- 2) If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, be warned—you are heading to an eternal death sentence that will never end. You will never ever again see the goodness or the glory of God. Respond to the Gospel now. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.