

The Second to Last Sunday of the Church Year
2 Thessalonians 1:3-10: "Justice Will Be Done on Judgment Day."
November 14/15, 2020 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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O almighty, eternal and merciful God, by Your beloved Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, You established the kingdom of grace for us in Your holy Church here on earth, that we might believe the forgiveness of our sins, since You are a God who has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live: We beseech You, graciously forgive us all our sins; through the same, Your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, p. 165)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the first chapter of St. Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. 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. / 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 – since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 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 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, 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. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, the Judge who comes with mercy and might to terminate the evil and crown the righteous (*ELH* #534, v. 1), dear fellow redeemed:

At the end of the Athanasian Creed, we confess that at the second coming of Jesus, "all will rise again with their bodies and will give an account of their own works. And they that have done good will enter into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire" (*ELH*, p. 30). So have you "done good" or have you "done evil"?

Certainly sometimes you have done good, but not always. If you had to stand before your Lord and King on the last day and give an account of every good and bad thing, what would there be more of? Jesus says, "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak" (*Mat. 12:36*). "Every careless word"!?! Where would we even begin? There are so many of them!

That's why hearing about "Judgment Day" makes us feel a little nervous. It doesn't sound like a very nice day. Jesus Christ, whom the world of men crucified, is coming again to judge the living and the dead. How will He judge us? In the Holy Gospel for today (Mat. 25:31-46), He explains that He will place the righteous who did His will at His right hand. And He will place the cursed who did not do His will at His left. You are counted among the righteous, but the credit for your goodness does not go to you.

If you try to take comfort in the good you have done, you will have no comfort. For every good deed, you can think of a bad one. You may have served someone in deep love, but you have also shunned another in deep hatred. You acted generously toward one, but selfishly toward another. You confidently spoke the truth and cowardly spoke a lie. You obeyed the authorities on one occasion and broke the law on another. For every righteous thought, word, and action, you can remember an opposing infraction.

But Judgment Day will not be a bad day for you. It is going to be a good day—a great day. You will not receive the Lord's wrath as you stand before Him. You will receive His mercy. Jesus will say to you: *"Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Mat. 25:34). How can that be? It is because you will not be judged by your own life. You will be judged by Jesus' life, by the perfect good He carried out on your behalf.

This is why Jesus calls us the "good" and "righteous" ones. We are those who were claimed as His own in Holy Baptism and covered in His righteousness. We are those who time and again have partaken of His holy body and blood in the Supper. We are those who have no good to boast of in ourselves, but who are declared righteous by faith in Jesus. This faith binds us to Him and produces the fruit of love toward the people around us, which Jesus counts as work done for Him.

That means Judgment Day is not a day to be feared. It is our day of victory. Jesus tells us that when we see the signs of the end times happening all around us, then we should *"straighten up and raise [our] heads, because [our] redemption is drawing near"* (Luk. 21:28). We should not worry about Judgment Day; we should look forward to it.

One reason we look forward to it is because *"when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,"* He will grant us relief from our afflictions. Being a follower of Jesus is not all roses in this world. Jesus tells us to expect trouble here on account of His name. He says, *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you"* (Joh. 15:18-19).

Why would the world hate Christians? We do not pursue violence toward those who oppose us. We deal kindly with our neighbors. We help the needy. Shouldn't the world praise us? But then Jesus did all those good things and more, and He was despised and rejected and nailed to a cross to die. The world's hatred of Christians is not rational. It's demonic. The devil is behind it. He wants to make our lives miserable, so that we deny our Savior and Lord.

But God turns the devil's wicked schemes into good for us. Paul told the Thessalonian Christians that despite all the afflictions and persecutions they were enduring, *"we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith."* Amidst all that trouble, Paul gave thanks to God because, he said, *"your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing."*

God used their afflictions to purify their faith like gold purified in a hot fire. That is hard to accept. Nobody wants to endure persecution and suffering and pain. We want God to give us only peaceful times and pleasant things. But if we received all the good things we wanted, what would that do to our faith? If we never suffered, we would cling to this life. We would not long for a better life to come. Suffering increases our desire *"to depart and be with Christ"* (Phi. 1:23), to join the great company in heaven around His throne.

But before that time comes, we often endure terrible things here on earth. You may have wrongly been accused of someone else's crime. You may have had something precious stolen from you. You may have been the victim of malicious lies, and your reputation never recovered. You may have been betrayed by someone you thought you could trust. You may have been taken advantage of or abused, and the offender got away with it. You may have been treated like dirt by someone who was supposed to care for you.

Where is the justice for these wrongs? Doesn't God see what is done to His people? Don't these vicious attacks and persecutions bother Him? Yes, they do. He sees every wrong done to His dear children. He knows how severely they are wounded, how deeply they are hurt. This is why He gave up what was most dear to Him. Out of love for the afflicted, He gave up His only Son.

God the Father sent His Son to take every wrong, every wound, every hurt into Himself. He came to bear that injustice, so you would have a way out from the anger, the pain, and the tears. *"Surely he has borne [your] griefs and carried [your] sorrows"* (Isa. 53:4). Jesus came to free you from these terrible burdens and to wash you clean not only from your sins, but also from the sins others have committed against you. His holy blood cleanses you from all sin (1Jo. 1:7).

But what about the wicked who have done horrible things and gotten away with them? What about those who piled up wrong after wrong and were never brought to justice? The mighty God assures us that the unrepentant will be brought to justice. Regarding the one who has *"spurned the Son of God"* and *"outraged the Spirit of grace,"* the Lord says, *"Vengeance is mine; I will repay"* (Heb. 10:29-30).

Our text says that *"indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you."* Hardened sinners will suffer for the evil they have done. When Jesus comes again in glory *"with His mighty angels in flaming fire,"* He will *"[inflict] 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."*

This is our Lord's promise, that all the wrongs done to us here will be set right. The people of the world who attacked Jesus and His Word and His faithful followers will not be able to find anywhere to hide. Even the deepest cave will not save them from His wrath (Rev. 6:15-17). *"And*

these will go away into eternal punishment," says Jesus, "but the righteous into eternal life" (Mat. 25:46).

We do not want to see anyone damned to hell, although we know that many will be. For our part, we pray that the wicked repent of their wrongs before they must face the terrible wrath of God. And we ask God to lead us also to daily repentance and a humble trust in His grace. We are saved only by His grace. We do not deserve salvation, but He gives it freely and fully because of His great love and compassion for us.

There is no doubt about it: **Justice Will Be Done on Judgment Day.** Those who have rejected the Lord and His Word of grace will answer for all the wrong they did on earth. They will be condemned to eternal torment in hell because they were not righteous before God. But those who have trusted in God's promises in His Word will not see His anger. They will be judged according to the life of Jesus, who was perfectly righteous.

So you do not need to be afraid of Judgment Day. It is the day of your victory over all that is wrong in this world. It is the day when justice will finally and fully be done, and you will take your blessed place in the presence of the holy God.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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