

⁵ All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. ⁶ God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ⁷ and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. ⁸ He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power ¹⁰ on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

In the name of Jesus Christ, the righteous Judge, dear friends,

Have you ever watched little kids play soccer? It can be wonderful, especially if it's your kid or grandkid out there. If any of the children here this morning have played soccer, you know how much fun it is! Grown-ups have fun watching you too. If you know a bit about soccer, you may know that when the ball goes off a player and out of bounds on the side of the field, a player on the other team throws it back in. But you can't just toss it in any way you want. Both hands must grasp the ball over the head and both feet have to be touching the ground when the ball is released. You get one chance to do it right. If you mess it up, the other team gets to throw the ball in to their players. Well, that's what's *supposed* to happen. BUT, if you're a young soccer player, it is sometimes different. If you watch little kids play soccer, you'll notice that when the ball goes out of bounds and the young boy or girl doesn't get the throw-in quite right, they are often allowed a second chance. We don't want to be tough on them; they are learning the game after all.

Second chances are part of life and learning, right? Spouses offer each other forgiveness and second chances for relationship mistakes. Students appreciate the opportunity for "extra credit" on tests and even the chance to take tests over sometimes. Employers usually don't fire people for their first mistake—even if it is a costly one. Second chances seems reasonable.

Our society in general is hesitant to accept drawing hard lines. We like lots of "gray" area and not so much black and white. We like to be tolerant and non-judgmental. Perhaps our cultural preference makes it difficult for many people when they are confronted by a perfect God who sees things in clear-cut terms and is uncompromising when it comes to sin and justice. The truth is, *our* sinful nature has an issue with God's perfect stance as well. All people need the instruction God gives regarding sin and grace, justice and judgment, heaven and hell. This Sunday of the Christian Church Year, Last Judgment Sunday and the reading from 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 give us the opportunity to consider these things. Through these words of the Apostle Paul we are taken to the Last Day and we see

JUDGMENT DAY'S GRIM REALITY AND BEAUTIFUL COMFORT
1. THE GRIM REALITY FOR THOSE WHO REJECT THEIR SAVIOR
2. THE BEAUTIFUL COMFORT FOR THOSE WHO BELIEVE

The simple, uncomplicated timeline that Jesus gave his disciples regarding the end of the world was this: on a day in the future—a day that only God knows—he will destroy this world and everything in it. On that day, Jesus will return visibly and all people will see him. The Savior will take all who have faith in him to be with him for eternity and those who did not put their trust in Jesus will be sent to hell for eternity. That's it, really. There is no thousand year reign on earth—no millennium, no believers snatched up to heaven and unbelievers left behind here on earth with a second chance to believe, nothing like that. The world is destroyed, believers go to heaven, unbelievers go to hell, end of story. But the words before us today first cause us to pause and consider the GRIM REALITY OF JUDGMENT DAY.

Three burly men on motorcycles pulled up to a highway diner. They went inside and there sat this truck driver—little guy—quietly eating his lunch. When the motorcycle guys saw him, they thought they'd have a little fun. They went over, grabbed his food away and made fun of him. The truck driver didn't say a word. He got up, paid for his meal, and walked out. One of the tough guys, ticked off because they hadn't succeeded in getting the little man into a fight, said to the waitress, "Boy, he sure wasn't much of a man, was he?" Looking out the window, she said, "Well, I guess not. I guess he's not much of a truck driver, either. He just ran over three motorcycles."

Revenge comes so easy to us, doesn't it? We plot and plan and look for ways to get people back. But God tells us that only he is to avenge. And so we, as God's people, fight our sinful urges to get people back for the bad things they do to us. We have to trust what God says here, that he will pay back trouble to those who trouble God's people. It is not our job. And the reason God would do that—bring punishment on those who oppose his people—is that when people in this world hurt us, it offends the God who loves us. And especially if people harm us BECAUSE we are Christians—that is an affront to God himself! THE GRIM REALITY OF JUDGMENT DAY is that those who torment us, God's children, will be paid back by the Lord, the righteous Judge. God doesn't tell us that so that we gloat over what they've got coming to them, but so that we know the reality and know that it is not our place to seek revenge.

When Jesus returns from heaven in glory with all his angels, THE GRIM REALITY is that he will bring punishment upon those who do not believe in him as the only Savior from sin. It may not be politically correct these days to narrowly define who is able to go to heaven like that, but it is biblically correct! As difficult as it may be to accept, God says that he will punish those who do not know him, who do not believe and put their trust in him.

It is ridiculous for anyone to look around and not know that someone created the world and everything else that we see. It is ridiculous for anyone to consider that everyone has a sense of right and wrong in them and not know that someone must have put it in everyone's hearts. That's not my opinion, that is what God says in the Bible. He says that certain qualities of his are obvious to everyone—his power and wisdom and divinity (Psalm 19:1, Romans 1:20). The problem is that so many suppress those observations; they fight against the thought of a God to whom they are accountable and reject any such God. Those are the people who are spoken of when it says **He will punish those who do not know God (v.8a).**

God also says **He will punish those who...do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.** This seems to be a different group of people. These are some other people you may know—people who have heard the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ, but who do not live a life of faith. To "obey the gospel" is to believe that good news about Jesus as our Savior. The gospel has been rejected by them. It has become unimportant for them. They have dismissed Jesus and they too will face THE REALITY of Christ's JUDGMENT.

And what does God say will happen to these people? **They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power (v.9).** Hell is real! If you have ever burned your finger on the stove or a curling iron or with a welder, you know that the pain is intense and it lingers and stings and you can hardly wait for the day or two or more to pass that it takes for that throbbing, burning pain to go away. Some time ago, I instinctively grabbed a cast iron skillet that had been on the grill for a while and badly burned a couple fingers. The pain was so intense that I begged Debbie to run to Walgreen's for some burn ointment. (I didn't have to beg too hard!) Imagine what it would be like to deal with that pain forever—constant burning pain that never goes away and doesn't consume you either. God describes hell as a place where those who do not trust in Jesus will be in physical agony that does not end.

And as awful as that sounds, it is not the worst part of it. The spiritual agony will be far worse. Have you ever seen the TV game show *“Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?”* It’s been on the air for over 15 years. And I always found it interesting to note the reaction of people who decided to stop on their way to the million dollars for fear that they wouldn’t have the right answer to the next question. They’d rather keep the money they have earned up to that point. Then, just for fun, the host would show the correct answer to the question they gave up on and they see that they would have answered correctly! They could have had tens of thousands of dollars more—or even a million!

You can magnify their reaction millions and millions of times when you consider that the ramifications of refusing Christ’s love have eternal consequences! Imagine the reaction on Judgment Day when the REALITY that Jesus really was the Savior—that they had heard that and maybe even believed that at one time—but they decided to live for themselves and this world instead. They knew the right answer, but they refused it or quit the fight of faith. Then the REALITY that Jesus really is the Savior and that he was serious about heaven and hell will sting far worse than flames. The eternal separation from the beauty and majesty of God will haunt them literally forever.

When a person dies they face the judgment seat of Christ. In the case of those who rejected God their Savior, their soul goes to hell and on the last day of final judgment, their bodies and souls are reunited and will remain forever in hell. That is THE GRIM REALITY OF JUDGMENT DAY. They will endure the physical and spiritual agony of hell. Although the world and other religions and even some Christians put their hope in a second chance, there isn’t one. We die—or the last day arrives—and that is it. The person who doesn’t trust Christ faces a horrible eternity. That is the GRIM REALITY.

But God also shares with us the BEAUTIFUL COMFORT FOR THOSE WHO BELIEVE in Jesus.

How can you not be encouraged by Paul’s words, written to encourage you every bit as much as they were written for those first readers? **All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering (v.5).** You are counted worthy of the kingdom by the Judge himself! What fantastic news! God actually looks at you and says, *“You are worthy to live with me for all eternity, to share in the blessings of heaven, to bask in the warmth and safety of my love.”*

That does sound very comforting, but...why? Why me? If you know that a perfect God can only dwell with those who are also perfect—and you know your imperfection—the natural question is *“Why me?”* That’s the question I would ask because I know my sins.

You may know the answer well. It is the saving gospel message and worth hearing again! It is because of Jesus. All by ourselves, we are entirely filthy with sin in the eyes of the holy God and unfit to get anywhere near him. But God sent Jesus to pay for your sins and mine and for the whole world’s. You and I deserved those flames of hell we were talking about and that eternal separation from God because by nature, we too reject Jesus.

But the amazing grace of God reached down and gave you the gift of faith. You believe in Christ and when you trust that Jesus perfectly obeyed the Father’s commands for you and willingly endured the cross and death—punished instead of you—then God responds with the BEAUTIFUL, COMFORTING message that you have been made worthy of eternal life because of what Jesus did in your place!

You may still shake your head and wonder why. You may be amazed that God would do that for you when you didn’t deserve it. You may cry tears of joy or bow before Jesus in all humility when you realize that you couldn’t be with him in heaven if he didn’t make possible. And if that is the case, then you know the amazing grace of God and it gives you great COMFORT.

Let me ask you something—Do you spend some time looking forward to heaven? I have heard some people express that more than others. I don't know if I personally consider it enough or talk about it with friends as much as I might. I know I do hear it when speaking to those enduring great difficulties in life. Some of us have people treating us poorly. Some are dealing with sickness or cancer. Someone told me on Thursday that they were disappointed to wake up from their surgery! Some are grieving for a loved one whom the Lord has called home. Some are just tired after many years on this earth and are ready to go home to Jesus. What BEAUTIFUL COMFORT is here FOR THOSE WHO BELIEVE! We are encouraged as we hear God say, "I will **give relief to you who are troubled.**"

Life can pressure us and wear us down and we look for relief. And the thing is, we won't find it in the things of this world that seem to offer it: We won't find that relief in drugs or alcohol or buying lots of stuff or intimacy or seeking different adventures. We will find temporary relief during earthly troubles when we turn to the Lord and acknowledge that all things are in his hands and that he does what is best for us.

More importantly, we have the COMFORTING promise of God that eternal relief waits for us in heaven because of Christ—and by faith in Christ, we will enjoy that rest and peace with God. JUDGMENT DAY will bring that physical relief as our perfected bodies are united with our souls and are no longer subject to disease or defect, to deteriorating or dying. With perfected bodies and comforted souls, we will glorify our Savior on that day. Paul said this will happen...**on the day Jesus comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.**

We will give glory to our God and marvel at our Savior. We know him now, but not like we will then! We believe in him now, but we will have absolutely no doubts then! We worship him now, but we can't even imagine how it will be to join in the praise of all the saints and angels that will adore him then! You think life as God's child is good now, but you and I have only a vague idea of how incredible eternity with our Savior will be!

We have the BEAUTIFUL COMFORT of these promises of God that cause us to actually look forward to JUDGMENT DAY because we know where we stand with the almighty Lord. If there is any doubt as to whether you will be in heaven with Jesus, I want you to draw COMFORT from the last words of our text. Speaking of those who will praise Jesus on JUDGMENT DAY, he says, **This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.** The gathering of saints around Jesus' throne on JUDGMENT DAY will include you, because you have believed the gospel of salvation by faith in Christ alone. There is no need to fear the Last Day, because on that day, you will be with your Savior forever. May this promise of God give you COMFORT and strength to continue the good fight of faith until that glorious day of salvation. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.