



Last week, we began a series that we're simply calling Advent. If you're unfamiliar with Advent, it is a season in the Christian calendar where we look back at the Christmas story and anticipate the birth of Jesus. We are looking at the book of 2 Thessalonians because it is a great book to study during this season. After all, it looks forward not to Jesus' arrival but to His return. Today, we're going to talk about the return of Jesus Christ. For some of you, a study on the end times is right down your alley, and you are very familiar with all aspects. For others of you, this is more uncharted territory. Jesus Christ will return to this earth. Our passage today is a sobering reminder that while Christians look forward to the return of Christ, those who are lost will have a completely different experience. Today, we're discussing "The Judgment of God When Christ Returns".

**Key Passage:** 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Looking back at your notes, what encouraged or challenged you the most from the sermon?
2. The God of the Bible is shown to be shrouded in holiness, a God who is to be revered and feared. He is also shown to be the most merciful, gracious, and loving God you could ever conceive of. How does this biblical view of God compare to how your nonbelieving friends, coworkers, or family view Him?

Many people cannot conceive the biblical view of God. Their image of God is a remade version of themselves who never disagrees with their opinion and certainly wouldn't be a God of judgment.

3. God is holy and loving, and He is mighty and merciful. What does it mean if we minimize either side of His character, we're left with a false gospel? When are we most tempted to emphasize one part of God's nature over the other?

The God of the Bible is shown to be shrouded in holiness, a God who is to be revered and feared because of His power and purity. He is also shown to be the most merciful, gracious, kind, and loving God that you could ever conceive of in your mind. Listen to me...BOTH are accurate and full pictures of the splendor of God. Take away one or the other, and you're left with a false gospel. Put them together, and you have the complete picture of the God of the Bible.

4. The Thessalonian believers were being persecuted for their faith. They were likely tempted to seek revenge, but Paul reminded them of something important. What is Paul saying when he says God will use their persecution to show His justice? What happens to our hearts when we're consumed with revenge? What does it look like to leave revenge in the hands of the Lord? How do you know when you're succeeding or failing at leaving vengeance in God's hands?

Verse 6 tells us that we never have to try to get revenge. The Bible tells us that God considers it *just* to repay those who have afflicted you – some of us have never thought about God in that way. When we get hurt, we want to get even. When we get hurt, we want everybody to know who hurt us. When we get hurt, we want the other person to be punished. These Thessalonian believers, under persecution, probably felt the same way! But, as we'll see, God gives us a different way forward: the coming judgment at Christ's return.

5. The Bible tells us that God considers it just to punish those who refuse to believe the gospel. What do we learn about His coming judgment in verses 8-9? How should this truth affect how believers live today?

### Three Descriptions of Hell

#### **It is a place filled with people.**

- **Who are these real people?**
  - **People who do not know God.**
    - Remember how Jesus spoke about people who looked very religious on the outside but were not saved? People who looked like Heaven but would spend eternity in hell? (Matthew 7:21-23)
    - “Knew” – speaking to personal involvement or experience (not gained by birth into a Christian family, not from the faith of a spouse or friend, not by attending a church).
    - In Matthew 7, Jesus clearly describes a situation where people have done all the surface-level religious things one can imagine but never submitted to Christ personally.
    - They know all the correct answers, but their heart has never been surrendered.
  - **People who do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus**
    - “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (John 3:36).
    - We are born under the wrath of God, we continue to live under the wrath of God, and we can die under the wrath of God. This is why Jesus is called our “propitiation,” the satisfaction of God’s wrath.
    - Whoever does not submit their life to Jesus, the wrath of God remains on him, and that will continue throughout eternity.

#### **It is a place of eternal destruction.**

- Some people wrongly believe that once those who do not have a relationship with Christ die, they don’t suffer in hell but instead are just “destroyed” or “annihilated.” This is a false doctrine known as annihilationism. How do we know the Bible isn’t teaching this? Look at the first three descriptions (people are there in hell – not obliterated; they’re suffering and experiencing punishment).
- Hell is a place of never-ending suffering.
  - In other words, this is an active, ongoing situation.
  - People are aware in hell, and that awareness is one of suffering.
  - Jesus told a parable that described the suffering of hell in Luke 16
  - There was a poor man named Lazarus and a rich man who both died
  - Lazarus went to heaven (not because he was poor), and the rich man went to hell (not because he was rich).

- "...The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'" Luke 16:22b-24
- Jesus is demonstrating the truth and reality of this passage – hell is an ongoing, conscious awareness of suffering.

**It is a place that is away from God's presence and glory.**

- Complete, utter separation from the presence of God.
  - On one end, you have people who are being separated into eternal banishment from the presence of God, while Christians will marvel at Jesus as He returns. Christians will celebrate and experience rest and relief when Jesus has finally returned.
  - In the Luke 16 parable from Jesus, it tells us that this rich man in his suffering looked up to Heaven and begged Abraham to send Lazarus to dip his finger in water and cool his tongue, "...for am in anguish in this flame." (horrifying, horrible, devastating view of hell)
  - Abraham replies, "...between us and you, a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us" (Luke 16:26)
  - Many people believe that even if hell exists, there will be an opportunity to get out at some point. This is the opposite of what the Bible teaches in Luke 16 and 2 Thessalonians 1.
  - Hell is an eternal, never-ending separation from the presence and glory of God.
6. How should the second coming of Christ encourage us to stand firm in the face of various trials? What does it mean that God will bring "rest" for His people? Considering all that we've discussed today, how should believers live?

Verse 5, in today's text, continues from last week when we saw Paul encouraging the Thessalonians believers as they faced their various trials. Paul is saying these believers' faith and endurance amid various trials were evidence that they had new life in Christ. God is giving these believers what they need – they're enduring by His power and grace in their lives. These Thessalonian believers were to see that these works of perseverance and endurance amid affliction were a work of God in their lives, and it was evidence of their worthiness to enter into the kingdom.

In the final few verses of today's passage, Paul says, "You've been faithful amid persecution; now continue in that faithfulness." Faithfulness is a sign that you are a part of God's family. Therefore, be ready for every work of faith by God's power so that others will see Jesus in you.

How are we to respond to a sermon on hell?

- We should be burdened about people's eternity.
  - This is why we exist as a church – to lead people away from eternal destruction and into a relationship with Christ.
  - This is why you serve here at church – whether greeting at the door, rocking a baby, teaching a small group, or something else – we want to lead lost people to Jesus.
  - This is part of why we give to our church – beyond obedience to God; I want to see lost people saved with my money.
- We should examine our own lives to see if we know Jesus.

- You're not saved because you were born into a Christian family, because you attend church regularly, or because you give money.
- You're not saved by the good things you try to do or by attempting to be the most moral person you know.
- You can only be saved by receiving Jesus by faith.

7. What's one personal takeaway from today's study you can focus on this week?