**Second Sunday of End Time – Last Judgment**

**Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY November 10, 2013**

**Based on 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 written by Vicar Ben Zuberbier**

**The Judge gives evidence He is just**

1. **In suffering**
2. **In retribution**

*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.*

Was that the right ruling? I don’t know about that decision. As a Christian I have to say the judges involved were definitely not just. And just look at the evidence—their ruling has resulted in the murder of an estimated 55 million unborn children.

When we look at the results following the trial of Roe V. Wade, now forty years later, and consider the majority vote of seven Supreme Court Justices to legalize abortion in the United States, it’s pretty obvious, their ruling was not just.

And now that we live in the End times when Judgment Day could come at any time, we might wonder about our God in heaven—is he a just Judge? We actually already have the evidence. The heavenly Judge’s stenographer, the Apostle Paul inspired by the Holy Spirit, has recorded the evidence that God, our Judge, is just. The evidence is in suffering and in retribution.

**I. In suffering**

The congregation in Thessalonica experienced suffering from the moment the Apostle Paul, and his traveling companions—Timothy and Silas—brought the good news of Jesus Christ to them. The majority of the Jews in the congregation were not convinced by Paul’s preaching that Jesus was the promised Savior. Paul’s message offended them. So they lashed out against the believers in Jesus in the congregation, most of them Greeks, and a small number of them Jews.

They were so infuriated they went to the house of one of these members named Jason,

dragged him out the door, and down the street to present him before the city officials. They hoped he would be convicted of treason for worshipping Jesus Christ as a King and not paying proper respect to Caesar. Of course, the city officials did not find grounds for such a conviction.

Suffering, affliction, and persecution probably came from those outside their membership too. Since Thessalonica was a Greek city, and its citizens were accustomed to worshipping the Greek gods, they too were probably offended by the gospel ministry going on in this Christian congregation. Maybe the moms and dads of the city didn’t let their children play with the Christian kids. Maybe there were certain vendors in the marketplace who refused service to the Christians. Maybe even fights broke out anytime the name, “Jesus,” was dropped. There may have even been attempts to burn down their synagogue where they would meet for worship. We don’t know what these Christians were suffering or how exactly, but the Apostle Paul wrote to them and said he was thankful they were enduring these persecutions and trials.

But he was thankful they were enduring *suffering*?????? Yes, he was. He put it this way in his

2nd letter to them he said, **“All this [persecution, suffering, and affliction] 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).** He was thankful that despite suffering they had not compromised on the saving message of Christ and him crucified. He was thankful they had not made concessions in their faith to appease the angry Jews among them. He was overjoyed they held on to their faith and didn’t give into the Greeks and take part in their worship of idols and false gods. That’s why he was thankful for this suffering. Their endurance was proof God had called them to faith and had placed his name on them and they were **counted worthy of the Kingdom of God**. This all was **evidence of God’s just judgment**.

Now the persecution in Thessalonica certainly wasn’t the first time members of the early church experienced suffering. In fact, this wasn’t even the first time someone was thankful for suffering and persecution. After Jesus had ascended into heaven and his disciples began spreading the news about his resurrection, the Jewish Ruling Council gave them specific orders not to preach, teach, or perform miracles in the name of Jesus. But regardless of these orders, of course the disciples carried on in their ministry. Whenever the opportunity presented itself, they would teach about Jesus. When the ill, poor, and afflicted came to them for help, they didn’t hesitate to perform miracles in Jesus’ name. They even preached sermons to the crowds in the temple courts in front of some of the Jewish leaders. It landed them in prison, but they didn’t stop. They were put on trial and convicted by the Council. Their punishment? They were flogged with a whip. Yet when they left the courtroom with bruised bodies and open wounds, they rejoiced **“because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name [of Jesus]” (Acts 5:41).** They thought of their open wounds and bruises as **evidence that God’s judgment was just.**

Rejoicing in suffering is what our faith compels us to do, because it’s fighting for and holding onto the saving message of the gospel in the Lord Jesus. Yet our sinful nature begs the differ. Its skeptical voice asks us, “If God’s judgment is just, why am I always getting flack from my coworkers for being a Christian? Why do my classmates look at me like I’m an ignorant idiot for refusing to believe evolution? Why do my neighbors think I’m weird for not letting a girl spend the night at my house? Or when I don’t stay up late with them Saturday night because I know I have church in the morning?”

So our sinful nature starts building a case against God. At looks at the evidence and forms conclusions. Its accusing voice prosecutes God saying, “He’s not a just judge. God doesn’t really love us? How can he allow his own children, his believers, to suffer? You know, this suffering really has to be coming from him, and not the devil, right? After all, he does have the power to make these sufferings stop, yet he allowed a typhoon to take thousands of lives in the Philippines. And how about this, how could God judge anyone for acting on their homosexual desires? He created them that way, didn’t he?”

Joining the side of the sinful nature in its accusations against God can be self-condemning. How? Well, you might start doubting God’s love for you. You might let go of certain parts of your faith so life will be easier with your classmates, coworkers, and neighbors and you won’t get any more trouble from them. And if you stop persevering, you might let go of your faith altogether, and you might lose faith in your Savior. That’s where God will see the evidence against you. He will not count you worthy of the Kingdom of God, his verdict will be, “condemned to hell for eternity.”

But that’s not the evidence God, the heavenly Judge, sees! His judgment is based on the **evidence he sees in Jesus’ suffering**. The final hours before Jesus’ death were packed with excruciating pain and torture. The Roman guards twisted together a crown of thorns and beat it into his head. As the blood trickled down his forehead into his eyes, they tied him to a post and lashed the bare skin of his back, the sharp stones and nails in the leather straps of the whip tearing holes in it. When they placed him on the cross, the splinters from the wood dug into the open wounds on his back, and nails pierced his hands and feet. Then they propped him up and he slowly suffocated as his diaphragm could no longer draw air into his lungs. Yet, he could have brought it all to a stop, but he didn’t. He willingly endured it all. He persevered until his last short whimpering breath, and died.

**Jesus’ perseverance and suffering is the evidence the Judge sees** in our case! Jesus took on the punishment we deserved and brought us peace. His suffering and death won us the verdict of “not guilty” before our heavenly judge who expunged the offenses our sins put on our criminal record. And this suffering granted us life after death in this world, because he rose from the dead conquering it for us. You and I will stand confidently before the Judge on the Last Day knowing without a doubt we’re innocent, blameless, and acquitted. **This is the overwhelming evidence our just Judge gives us!**

Remember how the disciples left the courtroom bruised and wounded yet still rejoiced? They rejoiced because they saw it as **evidence of Jesus’ suffering for them**. And Peter, who was there, gives us a note of encouragement in his 1st letter, **“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 1:12,13)**.

**II. In retribution**

When Christ’s glory is revealed as he comes back to earth in blazing fire and with a host of angels, your eyes and mine will witness more **evidence that the Judge is just** as he deals out **retribution** to both sides.

Those very people who brought us trouble in this world, **The Judge will repay with trouble**. In fact much more trouble than they gave us. **Their retribution** will be everlasting destruction in the blazing flames of hell because they did not know God. They will never find relief from their suffering but will experience it for all eternity. And they will be shut out from God’s presence because they didn’t believe the gospel of the Lord Jesus who suffered for them. **The Judge will bring this harsh Judgment on them**.

There’s comfort in that thought, right? Those who brought us all this trouble and suffering in our lives will finally get what they deserve—a massive dose of their own medicine. What goes around comes around—“Jerks.”

But is that really where we find our relief? In their retribution? No. God **“takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked” (Ezekiel 33:11)**. That’s not where we find our pleasure. Our relief is not in their death and punishment. **The relief God grants us is in our retribution**. The Judge will welcome us into his heavenly courtroom where we will see our defendant Jesus in all his glory testifying on our behalf. We will see with our own eyes the **“majesty of his power” (v 9)**, the very power which conquered sin, death, and the devil. Suffering, affliction, and persecution will never come near heaven’s gates. And we will share heaven in all joy with those who endured and persevered with us here on earth.

And what will our standing be in heaven be? Paul gives us the evidence already in verse 10 saying the Lord will be glorified in his holy people. When you stand next to Jesus you will not be inferior with a lower rank of glory. No, you will stand next to him and share the same glory he reflects. If you decide to look in the mirror once you’re in heaven, you will see the Lord’s glory in your reflection. You’ll see His perfection, His holiness, His righteousness. And you will join the choir of the heavenly host in singing, **“And nights of tears, though late and long, [have disappeared] in splendid dawn, and deeps of death [are all but gone]” (CWS, Hymn #731, V 4)**—**because** **our God is a just Judge, the evidence is clear**. Amen.