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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
16 November 2025

Sermon on 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

Worship Theme:

GOD'S JUDGMENT GIVES US PEACE

If you were making a list of things that might make society more peaceful, would you include "more judgment"? Likely not. Many people assume that judgment leads to conflict, not peace. However, a lack of judgment is a luxury many cannot afford. When we are horribly wronged, what are our options? Taking matters into our own hands? Despair? Jesus provides a better option. Trust that he will keep his promise to return, bringing judgment. The effect of that promise? We have peace, knowing that every wrong will eventually be righted by the one righteous Judge.

Sermon Theme: "The Just Judge's Judgment"

1. Rightly Punishes
2. Graciously Delivers

If you were standing in a courtroom before a judge, what would you expect to happen? Of course the answer to that question depends almost entirely on the reason you are there. Are you standing before the judge because of something YOU did, or because of something someone did TO you? Whether you stand before the judge as the victim or as the perpetrator makes a huge difference. If you are the victim, you are hoping for a just judgment that deals out appropriate consequences to the person who hurt you. If you are the perpetrator, then you are hoping for something – anything – that might help you out of the situation, something that will make the judge go easy on you or perhaps even set you free.

As the Thessalonian people are reading this letter from their dear friend and spiritual mentor Paul, what should they have been expecting? Because, in a way, the Thessalonians were both! They were victims of injustice and were being attacked for their faith in Jesus. But they were also sinners, people who had seriously offended the Lord of the Universe by their thoughts, words, and actions. As they hear the words "*all this is evidence that God's judgment is right*", what do you suppose they expected to hear next?

Perhaps it helps if we put ourselves in their shoes. That shouldn't be too difficult, because we know what it's like to live on both sides of this situation too, both victims and perpetrators. But if we're honest, we prefer to emphasize one of those much more strongly than the other. None of us wants to focus on how badly we have sinned against God, so we try to downplay that as not so serious or not all that bad when compared with what other people have done. At the same time we also heavily focus on coming to God with requests because we need so much in life: "God, I need this; God, please help with that; God, so and so did such and such to me and I don't know how I'm going to get over it." In other words, we know God is a just judge and we expect his judgment to always be against others instead of against us.

But there are two important thoughts to think here. First, we can't forget who we truly are by nature or ignore all the disobedient acts we commit every day. Second, do we truly understand what it means when God's judgment DOES come?

Let's start with the second one. When the time for God's judgment comes, *the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.* Never underestimate or forget how serious God is about sin and the consequences it deserves. God is the Creator of all things and the Ruler of all things, and therefore if God makes rules and laws for people to follow, he has every right to expect that they will be followed. And if they are not followed, God also has every right to punish those who disobey him and disregard his Word. And don't think for a second that this is just about other people! Remember the first point: we are all sinners, which means this is something every human being deserves. This is what WE deserve.

And there's evidence to prove it. God is everywhere and sees everything. He can perfectly recount for us every single moment of every single day of each one of our entire lives. If Judgment Day were today and I were standing before God the Just Judge, knowing full well that he knows everything I've ever done and that every one of my sins can be entered in as evidence, I would be feeling 100% guilty and crushed. I don't have a victim card to play here. I did those sins, and I know what I deserve because of them. And if God truly is a Just Judge, his Judgment against me will be swift and complete, and I will be **rightly condemned**, *punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord.*

Except that there is additional evidence to consider. And God the Just Judge considers all the evidence before making his judgment. *We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.* (2 Thess. 1:3-4) These are the two verses immediately before our reading today, and they are the "evidence" to which Paul points when he says *"All this is evidence that God's judgment is right."* A growing faith, increasing love, perseverance and endurance in persecutions and trials. What were these things evidence of? Not the greatness of the Thessalonians, or proof that they had higher character qualities than anyone else. No, this was all proof that Jesus was their Savior and that the Holy Spirit had worked faith in their hearts to believe that no matter what they did and no matter what happened to them in life, their Savior was stronger and nothing in all creation could overcome his cross and empty tomb. Which means the evidence placed in front of God wasn't there to condemn them – it was there to save them! Were they still sinners? Yes, and every day they proved that. But they were also something more, something new: they were saints, God's holy people, saved by grace through faith in Jesus.

What did all of that mean? First, it meant that anyone who attacked and opposed their faith was also attacking and opposing the God in whom their faith

was rooted, and anyone who fights against God does not and will not win. And second, it meant they the Thessalonians were *counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which they were suffering*. Again, not because of anything they had done; no, they were worthy of a kingdom of eternal peace and life all because of Jesus their Savior and what he had done for them. No amount of persecution or suffering would take that away from them. *When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels, he will be glorified in his holy people and be marveled at among all those who have believed*. He would be marveled at and glorified because Jesus became the only source of evidence to be considered by the Just Judge. And because of Jesus, anyone who believes in him is no longer victim OR perpetrator; they are simply holy, faithful, and loved children and citizens of the eternal kingdom of peace and life.

As I was thinking about all these things this week, a judge named Frank Caprio came to mind. Maybe you've heard of him. He was a judge in Rhode Island for many years and many of his courtroom cases were televised for a few years in a show called "Caught in Providence." A number of these videos are also online, and the reason people are so enamored with him and what he did is because he was a judge who did what people didn't expect. They showed up in his courtroom with fines and traffic tickets and things like that, expecting to be told what they needed to do to make things right. Instead, Judge Caprio frequently did the unthinkable: he forgave them. Dismissed the cases and dropped the charges. Most of those video clips are about little things like fines and tickets, and often the people were helped partly because of who they were: single parents trying to make it work, veterans who had served their country, people down on their luck and simply in need of a small break. But people walked out of his courtroom thankful beyond belief because someone had seen them in a tough time and had chosen to help them.

As nice and wonderful as all those things are, there is a far greater Just Judge who has done infinitely more, for people who could never deserve it. On Judgment Day, we and everyone else in the history of the world will stand before God the Just Judge. He will consider all the evidence, and he will make a perfect Judgment: everyone who rejected him and his Word and refused to believe in Jesus as Savior will receive eternal punishment in hell – something God is perfectly within his rights to do; and everyone who has faith in Jesus as their Savior from sin will receive eternal peace in heaven – something God is also perfectly within his rights to do. God is the Just Judge and his Judgment is always right!

But the day of that judgment hasn't come yet. So what should we do in the meantime while we wait? Stay firmly rooted in God's Word, feeding our faith so that our connection to Jesus remains alive and strong. And then we share his Word with as many people as we can so that they too receive faith in Jesus and are saved. This is eternally-life-changing work – what a blessing to be part of it! And what a gift that we can live each day knowing that no matter what happens in life, we have peace forever because of the Just Judge's Judgment. Thank you, Jesus! Amen.

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.