

“A Union of Glory” (2 Thessalonians 1)(3.13.22)

Scripture intro: In last week’s examination of this scripture, we focused on Christians living through suffering, trials, and persecution. The Thessalonians, and modern-day Christians, are able to face hardships by the sustaining grace and power of God. Spiritually, they are more than sustained, their faith and love grow.

Today, we will focus on 1) A dire warning; 2) An almost incomprehensible promise of blessing.

2 Thessalonians 1 (NIV84)

1 Paul, Silas and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

²Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.⁴Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

⁵All 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. ⁶God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you⁷ 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. ⁸He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power¹⁰ 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.

¹¹With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. ¹²We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: **"A Union of Glory"**

INTRODUCTION:

Don't we all want the good guys to get what they deserve and the bad guys to get what they deserve? When there is corruption, lying, stealing, bribery and the like; don't we want to see it end and the perpetrators punished? When we see violence, greed, and covetousness raise their ugly head; don't we want to see it end, the victims compensated, and penalties paid?

When dictators and despots grab power and their appetites bring oppression, doesn't it make you angry? How about when the world infiltrates the church, like the Russian Orthodox Church, and evil men collude with these dictators and despots. Not only is that happening now in the Ukraine, but it has been going on for nearly a decade – just not on the current scale.

My friends, God's decrees and promises bring me comfort. It seems right to me that EVIL will be brought to justice and the saints of God will be redeemed. It seems perfectly fitting that there WILL BE JUDGMENT. Remember, God's judgment is right. God is JUST. Our God never gets it wrong – always gets it right. He is perfectly righteous and the perfect judge. Not only is the evidence complete and accurate, it has not been tainted in any way. The standards have been made known.

The world is without excuse. The One who can see into the human heart does not judge like men judge.

Remember when God was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah? Abraham was being an intercessor. In speaking to the LORD, he said, Genesis 18:25 (NIV84) "Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" The LORD agreed that if 10 righteous people could be found, he would not destroy the cities.

You see my friends, God is longsuffering, merciful and loving. The destruction of the wicked gives Him no pleasure. Do not think of God's wrath in human terms. Do not think of divine vengeance in terms of human revenge. Think of Jehovah's justice like God's gravity. It is simply a fact in God's creation. The cosmic scales of justice require righteous consequences.

BODY:

These Thessalonians are being encouraged by Paul to keep being who they are in Jesus – holy people. They are being severely persecuted, troubled, suffering. In the next chapter of this letter, there is a section with the heading, "Stand Firm:" 2 Thessalonians 2:13–15 (NIV84)

¹³ But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.¹⁴ **He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.**¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

My friends, I must remind you that our Bibles are a record of the battle between good and evil. The day is coming when Jesus will return to usher in the kingdom. When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven [it will be] in blazing fire with his powerful angels. With the happenings in the Ukraine, I know many people are fearful. They wonder about World War III. They wonder if we are approaching the end times.

I do not know. But, it would not surprise me if what is happening with the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine is not part of the cosmic clash between good and evil.

I read an enlightening article in an online magazine called "Firebrand." It was published on Tuesday. The author is Todd Marshall a former missionary to the Ukraine. The article may also reframe our

understand that persecution for their faith may also be in play. Here is an excerpt:

“What many people don’t know is that Ukraine is the Bible Belt of the former Soviet Union. There are more believers in Ukraine than in the whole former Soviet Union combined. It has more seminaries, Bible colleges, and evangelical churches than in all of Russia.

When I was there, I often said that when the generation that never lived under communism came into leadership (which is now), the church in Ukraine would become a mighty force for the gospel. Ukraine has the largest concentration of evangelicals in all of Eurasia. It is in a strategic location and has begun to send out missionaries.

Over recent years, Ukraine has become a hotbed of church planting and mission work, going where Americans could not or would not go. Now, at this critical moment in church history, the enemy is attacking and seeking to destroy this work of God. Some seminaries and churches have turned into refugee centers while others have had to evacuate.

We are seeing sin and the work of the evil one on full display. This is a physical manifestation of a spiritual war for Ukraine... and the world. Satan does not care who wins or who loses. Satan celebrates the death, destruction, and the magnification of evil.

God, however, brings good out of evil and is spreading the seed of the Gospel through these Christian refugees who will have a strategic voice in their new homelands. The people they will encounter will say, "Tell me your story." Pray that these Ukrainians will have the courage and strength to give testimony to God's grace despite their suffering."

Do you want justice for Ukraine? Do you want justice for all the persecuted Christians and oppressed people in the world? Our God promises that very thing. And, make no mistake, "They [those causing the suffering] will be punished with everlasting destruction." That is a foreboding warning; It is hard to even comprehend a destruction without end. And yet, that is what the Bible teaches. If it makes you uncomfortable to contemplate, I believe that is a good thing.

Who are those bound for destruction? Those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. If they knew God, they would obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They would live under the law of love. They would love their neighbor as themselves. You cannot love God and hate God's children. The good news of Jesus, received by faith, results in an ever-increasing love.

So, we have two groups of people: the saints who will be glorified by, with, and in Jesus; and the "aints," who are bound for everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.

Well Pastor, what about those in the middle? There is no middle mentioned in the scriptures. There are only two destinations. Some might think, "I am not oppressing anyone. I am not violent. I do more good than bad. I am a pretty good person."

Romans 14:23 (NIV84) "But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and **everything that does not come from faith is sin.**" Do you have an active conscience? If not, you cannot be living in Christ. Do you ever act in a way about which you feel convicted? Repent – trust and obey God the Holy Spirit within you. Live by your faith, your trust in Jesus.

Hebrews 11:6 (NIV84) "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." We live in a world made by a Divine Creator. The Lord Almighty laid the foundations of the world and all that has been made must exist within the parameters of the Lord's will. Not only actions, but motivations must be pure and heavenly guided. Like these Thessalonians, we must live out a faith that is growing more and more.

To be among the saints, brings a series of great promises: Jesus will be glorified in his people; the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in Christians; and, we will be glorified in the Lord Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to be glorified? Let us start with the Merriam Webster Dictionary definition of glory:

1 a: praise, honor, or distinction extended by common consent: renown

b: worshipful praise, honor, and thanksgiving < giving *glory* to God >

2 a: something that secures praise or renown < the *glory* of a brilliant career >

b: a distinguished quality or asset

3 a (1): great beauty and splendor:
magnificence <the *glory* that was Greece and the
grandeur that was Rome—E. A. Poe>

(2): something marked by beauty or resplendence
<a perfect *glory* of a day>

b: the splendor and beatific happiness of heaven
broadly: eternity

4 a: a state of great gratification or exaltation <
when she's acting she's in her *glory*>

b: a height of prosperity or achievement

Here is the definition of **glorify:**

1 a: to make glorious by bestowing honor, praise,
or admiration

b: to elevate to celestial glory

2: to light up brilliantly

3 a: to represent as glorious: extol <a song
glorifying romantic love>

b: to cause to be or seem to be better than the
actual condition <the saints reflect Jesus' glory>

4: to give glory to (as in worship)—

glo•ri•fi•ca•tion

If you look in the table of contents in your hymnals, you will see that the hymns start on page 57. The first section is titled "The Glory of the Triune God." That section goes all the way to page 152. We give glory to God with our hymns of praise and worship.

There are some biblical aspects of glory not addressed by the Merriam Webster dictionary or only hinted at. Part of God's glory is His infinite perfections: purity, moral attributes, holiness, and righteousness. Our God is the culmination of glory. You may remember that in Psalm 24, God is called the King of Glory five times. The heavens declare the glory of God. God is the consummation of glory. Isaiah 6:3 (NIV84)

³And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory."

Habakkuk 2:14 (NIV84) For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

Jesus, as God the Son, is glorified with the God the Father. John 1:14 (NIV84) The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen

his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Hebrews 1:3 (NIV84) The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

What an incomprehensibly awesome promise, that God offers us participation in His glory. Christians, God's holy people, who the Bible calls saints, you and I, can share in God's glory, in a mysterious way.

Romans 8:17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also **share in his glory**. 1 Peter 5:4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive **the crown of glory** that will never fade away. Colossians 1:27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, **the hope of glory**. Colossians 3:4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear **with him in glory**.

Preacher J.I. Packer explains, starting with 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV84):

¹⁸ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

"Glorification is the scriptural name for God's completion of what he began when he regenerated us, namely, our moral and spiritual reconstruction so as to be perfectly and permanently conformed to Christ. Glorification is a work of transforming power whereby God finally turns us into sinless creatures in deathless bodies. The idea of our glorified final state includes (a) perfect knowledge of grace, through limitless extension of our powers of understanding (1 Cor. 13:12); (b) perfect enjoyment of seeing and being with the Father and the Son; (c) perfect worship and service of God out of a perfectly integrated nature and a heart set perfectly free for love and obedience; (d) perfect deliverance from all that is experienced as sinful, evil, weakening, and frustrating; (e) perfect fulfillment of all our unconscious desires for communion with God); (f) perfect completion of all that was good and valuable in this world's life but that had to be left incomplete because desire outran capacity; and (g) endless personal growth in the encompassing of all these perfect things."

Through this participation in God's glory there is union with Christ and His glory. Christ is glorified

IN and THROUGH His holy people. It is because of Christ's manifestation within us, through faith, and not from anything originated from us. The name of our Lord Jesus refers to the fullness of all of Him...which will be glorified in us; AND, us in Him – according to the grace of our God.

Charles Spurgeon used an interesting illustration, which I will modify. Imagine a space full of mirrors. In the center of the space is the Lord Jesus Christ in all His glory, brilliance, radiance, and majesty. We, Christians, Christ's saints, are the mirrors. Jesus' glory fills the space. We reflect it back. The glory of God cannot be contained, and it bursts forth into all creation.

CONCLUSION: My friends, humankind is offered here in 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, a clearcut choice. They can choose eternal destruction – a fire that never goes out and a worm that never dies. Or they can choose an amazing union with their Creator in glory, joy, and love.

On the night before His crucifixion, death, and burial, Jesus prays for all believers in John 17:20–26 (NIV84)

²⁰“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they

also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

²⁴“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

²⁵“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me.²⁶ I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

Amen and amen. Let us pray.