

**+ 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 + The Day Is Surely Drawing Near +
+ 3rd Sunday of End Time: Last Judgment + 8 November 2015 +**

Have you ever had a day that filled you with mixed emotions? What I mean is that there are some days that do double duty. They fill you with excitement, and they also fill you with dread...at the same time. Chances are pretty good you've probably experienced a day like that.

Maybe it was graduation day. You were in high school or college or grad school, and you couldn't wait for that day. Maybe your graduation anticipation started the moment you stepped on campus. Yet graduation day isn't just about eager anticipation. That day brings a mix of nerves and some sadness when you realize how uncertain your future might be or that life after graduation is going to change completely or that life won't be the same because you and your friends are going your separate ways.

Maybe it was your wedding day. You and your spouse-to-be joyfully looked forward to that day as each week you got closer to "The Day." The more you planned, the more real it became. Soon you would finally be a married couple, but even then maybe there was a little anxiety. Every couple has questions before they get married, questions like "How will our lifestyles mesh?"; "Kids and a family?"; "Finances?"; "What about my bad habits? Will we annoy each other too much?" On top of all that you realize that your relationships with your family and friends will never be the same.

Maybe it was the day you retired. It was a day you had looked forward to for years. You wouldn't have to clock in at work on a daily basis anymore. So you were excited for that day, but maybe there was a certain amount of fear because of all the uncertainty that comes with a big life change. You wouldn't have a daily job and your income would be much more fixed.

Maybe for you it was a different day, but typically those days that fill us with joy and fear almost always end up being joyful days that we remember fondly for years. There is another day in our future that has a similar effect. That Day fills some people with such comfort that it helps them withstand the most violent persecution. Others it fills with such dread that they'd prefer to ignore that it will ever happen.

That Last Day is in everyone's future. Yes, it naturally fills us and all people with real dread, but for us believers, that Day also fills us with great comfort even though we have no idea when it will come. No matter how that Last Day makes you feel, **THE DAY IS SURELY DRAWING NEAR!**

When Paul and his mission team came to the bustling city of Thessalonica, it was a field ripe for the harvest. In just a few weeks, their efforts to proclaim the good news of Jesus began to bear fruit as some Jews and a large number of Greeks converted to Christianity. The Lord richly blessed their efforts, but that blessing soon filled the local, unconverted Jews with such jealousy that they set off a riot against Paul and his team. The Jews charged them with treason claiming that they were peddling Jesus as a king opposed to Caesar. So Paul and his team had to leave, but persecution remained for the new Christians who stayed behind.

Later Paul wrote a letter to encourage those Thessalonian Christians to remain faithful no matter what. Paul worried how they would react under pressure, especially since the Thessalonians were such new Christians. Yet in spite of the newness of their faith, Paul received good reports. In fact, their congregation flourished as the Gospel continued to spread, but they needed more encouragement because the persecution continued.

The believers wondered if it would ever end. They wondered why God allowed them to go through such suffering. So Paul pointed them to the Last Day. He wrote to his beloved Thessalonians, ***"All this is evidence that God's judgment is right...God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you...He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."***

Why would the Last Day terrify people? That fear starts with the simple fact that God is just. From the days of our first parents, Adam and Eve, the Lord has commanded perfect obedience to his holy will. God's holy will covers every aspect of our lives, yet every one of us daily and willfully disobeys his commands. God commands us all to ***"be holy, because I the Lord your God am holy"*** (Leviticus 19:2), and for any and all who disobey any of his commands, God has promised the just punishment of death. ***"The soul who sins is the one who will die."*** (Ezekiel 18:20 God is deadly serious about sin. Anyone who rejects him, anyone who disobeys him, anyone who serves another master can expect God's just and eternal punishment for sin on the Last Day.

For the Thessalonians, they were relieved to hear that those who persecuted them would be punished, but it was also a warning to them if they turned away from the true God and the good news of Jesus Christ. If they

did not remain faithful, if they did not persevere, they would deserve the same punishment as the enemies of Christ who persecuted them.

Pretty sobering words, aren't they? Remember that they don't just apply to Greeks living 2,000 years ago. If what God says is true, then people you know and love who do not hold to Christ and his Word will fall under God's just judgment on the Last Day. Yet Paul's words get even more personal. Such coming judgment terrifies your sinful nature and mine. By nature you and I are completely opposed to God. Your sinful nature wants you to look at God's threats of judgment and think "out of sight, out of mind." Yet if your sinful nature is in control, you can quickly grow lax in your faith and in how you handle God's Word. Pretty soon you set yourself up for God's judgment.

That's why the Last Day terrifies people. Paul describes it, ***"This will happen when 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..."*** Hollywood couldn't do the Last Day justice. Jesus himself tells us a loud trumpet will sound and all the dead will be raised. The Son of Man will come in glory and blazing fire with all the hosts of heaven beside him.

All people will be called to account by the holy Judge. Those who have knowingly or unknowingly rejected the Lord and his forgiveness will hear from Jesus, ***"I don't know you...Away from me..."*** (Luke 13:27) They will be justly punished for their rejection and unbelief as they are eternally separated from God's loving presence in hell. They will endure eternal death forever. How terrifying to only see the perfect love and peace of God from a distance and live an eternity of regret, grief, and being dead to his love! How dreadful!

Yet as terrifying as the Last Day will be, that Day will even more powerfully bring us comfort and joy! Paul explains, ***"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. God is just: He will...give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well..."***

The Last Day won't just be about judgment. For us, it will be a source of unending comfort. Our God is also a gracious God. The Lord in his grace saw your sorry and lost condition and did something about it. Jesus came gently and humbly as a tiny infant and perfectly grew up into an adult. He became your substitute where you have failed. He lived the perfect life you could not accomplish and then offered up that life. As your substitute, he suffered the hell you deserve for your sins and presented his life as the sacrifice for your sins. As your substitute, he conquered the terrifying power of death by rising from the dead. Jesus did all of that to make you holy taking away all that guilt that fills you with dread when you hear about the Last Day.

You see, on the day of your Baptism—a day that no one, but your sinful nature dreaded—Jesus drowned your sinful nature in the water and the Word. A new self was born within you that loves to obey the will of your gracious God. Now your sinful nature does come back, yet Christ's forgiveness is always more powerful. That forgiveness comes to you again and again as you hear and study the good news of your Savior in his Word.

Through faith in Jesus, you can now confidently stand before the Lord as his holy child—not because of your own merits or attempts at gaining God's favor or doing the right thing, but because your life, your everything are covered with Christ's holy blood. That good news of forgiveness and rest and eternal glory through Jesus moves you from careless Christianity into Gospel-motivated service to the Lord. Yes, the Last Day is coming, but Christ leads you to see that the time he gives you before then is one great opportunity to serve him with your life.

The Thessalonians could look forward to the reality that their suffering would end. You and I can also look forward to the eternal rest that's coming in the future. In our future, the Lord will end the effects and consequences of sin and the trouble you endure for standing firm on God's Word. That fact comforts your soul and fills you with anticipation as you endure hardship in this life looking forward to the perfect rest that Jesus will bring you.

What a day that Day will be! ***"...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."*** Paul wrote something similar in Colossians 3:(3-4), ***"For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."***

Right now you and I look like everybody else. Christ is hidden within us, but on the Last Day, how glorious it will be as all who trust in Christ will be revealed in glory! What a sight as people from every nation, tribe and language come together around the throne of the Lamb to live in the eternal joy of God's loving presence! There will be no more threats, no more wrath, no more punishment, but instead there will be life, joy, and comfort in Christ.

The truth is, in the future, you'll probably have more days that fill you with mixed emotions, but the Last Day will be like no other. You need not dread that Day. Our just God is a gracious God and has forgiven our sins through Jesus. So look forward to the Last Day without fear. Yes, look forward to the Last Day with eager joy, because Christ is coming soon! Amen.