

### **Jesus is the Just Judge.**

Is God punishing me? When something bad happens to us, or to someone we love this question plagues us. We try to live by God’s commandments and share the good news of Jesus in our conversations, but then life seems to get more difficult. This is nothing new, Christian.

Some Jews, some God-fearing Greeks, and a few prominent women made up that first congregation in Thessalonica. But jealous Jews who rejected Jesus and Paul’s preaching formed a mob and started a riot that didn’t subside until the city officials got involved. The believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea under the cover of night for their own safety (Acts 17). But the persecution didn’t stop. The believers there had to wrestle mightily with this question, “Are we being punished?” “Are we accepted by God?”

Suffering, trials and tribulations come to all Christians. Co-workers seem to stop inviting you out with the group after work because you talked about your Savior and your faith. Your teacher mocks you or Christians in general for believing that God created the world in six days, or that God even exists, and doesn’t want to see that kind of answer on quizzes, tests, or in discussion. Friends turn into enemies when you stand up for the truth. And you still care about them, but they don’t seem to care about you. You take heat from your teammates or even your coach because you take off early from practice to get to Confirmation Class. You seem to be the only one. You battle tiredness and lack of motivation to get to Monday night church because you couldn’t get to church on Sunday. You go alone to God’s house even though your husband or wife or children or parents could go with you, but don’t.

The Thessalonians suffered because of their faith. But an interesting thing happened. Their faith in God’s promises and love grew. Their love for one another increased. They genuinely cared about one another, lifted each other up. This became well known to the other congregations and an encouragement for them even today.

Paul was compelled to thank God for what God did among the Thessalonians and to encourage them to keep going. Suffering for them was not evidence that God was punishing them or disapproved of them. The opposite was true, God sustained them through his Word and grace. God built them up and fanned the flame of their faith into action. **Jesus is the Just Judge.**

*“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.”* I remember some of the jobs I had. Starting them was exciting, but also terrifying. Do you remember thinking that you were messing everything up and your work would not be acceptable, and you’d probably be fired because of the pace, but then your boss comes to see and says, “good job!” And you think, “What? Really?” Here were these Christians struggling along and wondering if they were good enough. And Paul tells them what God thinks of them. “Great job!” God used these hardships to build them stronger, and build them together, and even embolden them to get out there and look for new ways of sharing the Savior with a world so desperately in need of Him.

Don’t think that God doesn’t see you or what you go through. Don’t ever think that God doesn’t care for you, because he does (+). But boy, aren’t there sometimes where we doubt it? A loved one is lost. Disease and sickness have come upon us full throttle. We feel rejected by others because we follow Jesus. Why should it be so hard? It is difficult to endure.

*“God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well.”* God allows suffering and persecution from others, co-workers, acquaintances, governments, family members with good purpose. *God is just.* Things in this life will look pretty backwards – we live in a sinful world. It seems the godless prosper and have it all and have found happiness and we get all the grief (Psalm 73). But God sees. *He will pay back* the trouble they are dishing out. It’s not a reason for us to gloat or say, “ha ha.” But it is reality. God will give to us comfort and relief with Paul and all Christians who have suffered for their faith. How long O Lord?!?

*“This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.”* The good news about our Savior and his wonderful life, death and resurrection for us change us to realize that God does love us and does care even when we don’t feel it. But we will see and feel when he returns. The

heavens rolled back. The trumpet sounds, the voice of the archangel resounds announcing “He’s here. He’s back, just as he’s promised.” And on the clouds with all his glorious angels he will return just as he promised the disciples at his ascension.

How many of you are big brothers/sisters? Isn’t it fun? You pick on your little siblings a little bit. They tattle on you; you get time outs and spankings. Mom and Dad question whether you love one another. But then you see someone else picking on your brother or sister. And you show up. And the bullies see you coming. What do they do? They step back with worry. They turn and run. And you say to them, “Never again.”

Jesus says to those who persecute his children, “Never again.” *“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 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people...”* **Jesus is the Just Judge.** He will deliver those who are his own. Those who do not know him and those who knew him but did not trust him or believe in him, but trusted in their works and wisdom, these he will shut out from his presence. The worst way to describe hell is ‘You don’t have Jesus.’ You are shut out from his love, his blessing, him. This is the fate of all those who ignore the evidence they see in nature – the sunsets, the way our bodies are made, how it all fits together. This is the fate of all those who have heard of Jesus, even read his Word, but reject him, mock him for the pursuit of pleasure or worldly wisdom. These are the people who persecute you. And they will be punished with this torment forever. When they make you feel alone. When they mock you. When they leave you out. When you get less pay at work or less playing time because you missed that practice for time in God’s Word or that game for time in God’s house. When friends give you grief because you didn’t stay up so late with them or hunt with them that morning because you wanted to be with your family in God’s house. When your neighbors think you foolish because the corn stands out there for five harvestable hours because you needed to be in God’s house, to honor him who gives you the harvest and loves you. When they hurt you or withhold love from you because you hold on to Jesus, remember Paul’s words. And pity them. Pity them because their destiny is so awful, and yours is so glorious. And for that you can rejoice.

*“...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.”* God wants to be with you. He wants to be glorified in you. He will not rest until you are at home with him safely in heaven. And you will marvel at Him. Things you wondered about. Things you never fully understood. Things you imagined about heaven and about Him that you now realize you shot too low. You will marvel at him. More than a groom marveling at the beauty of his bride walking up the aisle with her father. More than a team standing victorious on the field or court or ice wonders at how they ever won. More than parent wondering in amazement at the first sight of their child. More than a traveler wondering in amazement at the sight they travelled so long to see. More than the paralytic whom made walk for the first time. More than the blind man Jesus made see. More than the deaf who heard Jesus’ voice. More than anything. You will marvel at him.

**Jesus is the Just Judge.** We don’t deserve him to judge us righteous. We know our sins, our failures, the times we’ve covered that little light of ours to save face or keep friends, that time we left him in the dust to sin as we wanted again, the times we picked past times and pleasure and friends over him, and we know we don’t deserve him to forgive us. We know we are not acceptable or good enough. But **the just Judge is Jesus.** And his nail marked hands judge you his own. His promises pronounce you forgiven. His judging is his business. And even though all of this is a gift from him – the faith in your heart to believe, the good works and fruits of faith he does through you that glorify him and help your neighbor, even though he and his love is the cause of it all, he judges you “Acceptable,” “Good,” “His.” Paul says, *“This includes you, because you believed our testimony about you.”*

Dear Christian, do not give up. Let your light shine. Endure persecution. Go to the Lord and his Word. He will grow you in faith. He will grow us together as a family of believers in his kingdom. Follow the **Just Judge.** It is **Jesus**, your Savior, your God. If anyone troubles you, he sees it and will repay. To you he will give eternal life. **Jesus is the Just Judge.** Marvel at him and thank him each day now and eternally. Amen.