

## 2 THESSALONIANS 1:5-10

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November 12-14 Last Judgment (2022)

Smith

### To Be Marveled At

**5 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 glory of his might 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.**

The idea of a final judgment is common to many pagan religions, but the Last Judgment is a mystery in the Bible's definition of the word mystery. A mystery in the Bible is something unknown to the world, unknown through nature, but which is revealed only in the word of God. So we can refer to other mysteries, like the incarnation of Christ, the atonement through the cross, and other things, and like them, the Last Judgment is a mystery that is only revealed by God in his word.

Because it is a mystery, the Last Judgment pleases us, because God has chosen to reveal it only to us in his word. It isn't a secret; it's something to be proclaimed. But the only image from my childhood of men and women walking around with sandwich board signs hanging over their shoulders with the word "Repent! The End is Near!" is a mockery; it doesn't preach the gospel of Christ. It only tells people to be afraid, and it holds back the message of forgiveness and therefore it becomes a pagan heresy, as if to say, "We know something and don't, so be afraid!" But the Bible's teaching about the Last Day gives us joy because God has not held back anything we need to know about it.

The Last Judgment also pleases us because it is the foundation for every comfort we receive in all of the perilous adversities and adventures of this life. Paul says, it will be "**to give relief to you who are troubled,**" on account of "**the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.**" People are frightened by a lot of things: the unknown, diseases, cancers, wars, and especially we know true fear when our children are gone, traveling, trying something new, stretching their wings a little. Or if you yourself become lost, or confused, or weak. Or when someone you respect or love turns out to be an opponent of Christ, and you grieve for them. The teaching of the Last Judgment tells us that something better is coming.

The doctrine of the Last Judgment is also a very effective incentive to living a Christian life, because whoever truly believes the Judgment is coming will follow God's Word and arrange his life for godliness, and will walk carefully.

The doctrine of the Last Judgment is also an effective incentive to reach out with the gospel, because souls are at stake. Todd Wendorf, who was our staff minister when I first came to St Paul's, once told me the story of a man walking along the beach one morning after a storm at sea. The beach was covered in starfish, and the man knew that when the sun rose, they would all bake and die. But then he saw a boy standing in the middle of all of this, picking up one starfish after another, and he was throwing them into the water. The man went to the boy and said, "You can't possibly save them all. It's a tragedy, and it's sad, but you can't save them all." And the boy said: "I can save this one."

The doctrine of the Last Judgment is a true treasure of the church, because the heathen believe that if there is an end, life will either just end, but the Lord God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, has shown us eternity beyond.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, an angel told the Apostles that they would see him come back the way he had gone, in the clouds. We shouldn't set aside the literal meaning of "clouds" in this case, because Jesus also says: "You will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62). These won't be the puffy white clouds that delight us, but the clouds of judgment, filled with thunder and lightning and all the noise of a fierce storm, like the storm out of which God spoke to Job.<sup>a</sup> These clouds will be our view of the Glory of the Lord, to show us that he is the same one who led Israel through the wilderness and led them through the sea and finally to the promised land.

Our Judge will be Christ. Of course, all three persons of the Trinity have the power and the authority to judge, but Scripture says that Christ will administer the judgment, visibly and in his assumed human nature. And good angels and godly human beings will be judged first. Not one of our sins will be spoken aloud, for Christ has paid for them, and the Father has told us that he has forgotten them on account of Christ. Instead, our good works will be recounted, to our utter amazement, and we will wonder when we ever did such things that God will paint with words of glory, honor, affection, and delight.

After that, the wicked people, the unbelievers, will be judged, and with them the evil angels, Satan, and the Antichrist, or all those men who have held the seat of the Antichrist over the centuries, including the man sitting in his seat today, even as we speak.. The only criteria for those who are condemned is if they don't have faith in Christ, for the Bible teaches in the last chapter of Mark that only unbelief damns (Mark 16:16). Their sins will all be recounted, person

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<sup>a</sup> Job 38:1; 40:1

by person, sin by sin. Why would God do that? To give him glory, to that the reason for the verdict of eternal damnation, and to proclaim his justice.

Paul describes the verdict and their condemnation: **“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.”**

For us, the knowledge of Judgment Day as it approaches closer and closer every year and every day, makes us want to share the word of God with the world. It makes each of us want to amend our lives, to give up on sin altogether. Because we know Jesus, it also drives us to repentance.

Repentance has two parts: Sorrow over sin, and faith in the forgiveness of sins through Jesus. That sorrow over sin is the terror we feel in our conscience over our sins-- that somehow I am always leaning away from Christ and always leaning, inclining to a sin. We feel that terror because we been told how awful, how terrifying hell will be, and we've been shown that we deserve that punishment. The punishment of hell is described as being both physical and spiritual, an agony in the body of the fire that can never be quenched, and an agony in the spirit and in the mind of a worm, gnawing and always moving its way through the flesh, mind, and understanding of the one being punished, always remembering their sins, always knowing that they fell short of God's only requirement. “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved,” Jesus said, but the very definition of one the damned in hell is one who turned away from Christ and held up his or her own opinion, and said, “I love this more dearly; it is my precious thought over God's pathetic desire for me.” And it will be too late.

For the faithful, how much faith is enough faith? Paul assures us that first of all, it won't be up to us to do anything, for in God's judgment **“you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God.”** For this, **“he will be marveled at,”** because of his unexpected grace and glory.

And who will be called forward to step into paradise as Christ smiles on you and welcomes you home? Paul says: **“This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.”**

What a surprising revelation and mystery this is! To have my sins, all my failures and my mistakes, brushed aside by God, like a mother washing the dirty face of her child as he comes into the house after a hard day of playing outside, so that that child knows he is still her treasure, still her darling, her dear, her beloved. This is how God thinks of you, with compassion, love, kindness, and grace. He has removed your sins forever. He has prepared for you a place with him in heaven. Don't think for a minute that he might skimp on his blessings for you. He will lavish you with love and life and joyful friendship, forever, all on account of Christ. Amen.