

God is Not Blind

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Preacher: Alistair Chalmers

[0 : 0 0] Well, thank you very much, Johan, and everyone else who's been involved in the service. Please do have that Bible passage open in front of you, as we'll be diving in and out of it throughout this evening.

In August 2021, the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, and the persecution of Christians absolutely rocketed.

Afghanistan is now the number one country in the world where Christians are persecuted, according to the charity Open Doors. There were reports early on of Taliban soldiers going door to door, killing Christians and hurting anyone who helped hide them.

Similar stories come out of Iran. One story I read this week was a couple who had become Christians from a Muslim background, and they began to attend their underground church network.

But one night, their door was kicked in. They were arrested, blindfolded, beaten, interrogated, and imprisoned. Only months later to be released to flee Iran, never to return for fear of their lives.

[1 : 1 4] The persecution in these places is a constant threat. And those are just the stories we know about. There are countless, or there will be countless of stories across the world of Christians being persecuted and mistreated for their faith in Jesus.

But it isn't always systematic and physical, is it? We'll probably all know stories of Christians being rejected for certain jobs and professions in this country for their faith.

Scientists mocked. Politicians scorned. Teachers looked at with intrigue to see whether their teaching is right and what conversations they're having with their students.

Or Christians being denied access to venues for a conference because of the message that they will proclaim about Jesus. Christians being silenced or fired from their jobs for their views that run contrary to the world.

Christians in the West, generally speaking, aren't persecuted physically, but we are certainly not welcomed with open arms. Whilst our physical well-being might not be in danger, there are plenty of other ways that the world uses to make a stand against Christians and our faith.

[2 : 3 8] With so much going on against Christians, it can be easy to think that God is blind to the persecution and oppression of his people.

But we'll see the truth this evening. The truth I want us to fix our eyes on is to remember, as we turn to 2 Thessalonians, that God is not blind. There is not a second of suffering that his people endure for his name that he doesn't see and that doesn't grieve him.

Remember the context of this letter that we looked at last week. This church in Thessalonica were being persecuted physically. So how does Paul encourage and build up these Christians who are in a daily battle?

Well, in our passage for tonight, he gives them a signpost. A signpost of the future that awaits them and awaits those who persecute them. These Christians were being attacked, attacked from outside and from within.

False teachers inside spreading lies about the return of Jesus. And so this is a hurting church. Maybe they thought that God was blind to their suffering.

[3 : 57] And so Paul steps in and encourages them by giving them certainty of the future. The future that awaits the wicked. Those who are persecuting this church.

Those who reject Jesus. And the future of Christians. The future that we await as Jesus returns and the struggles in this life are over.

And my hope is that as we study these two truths together from our passage, that we'll be encouraged and to stand firm in our faith. And in the midst of suffering for the name of Jesus, that we'll be comforted with the knowledge that whatever we face in this life, God sees it all and he will bring justice.

And if you're here and you're not a Christian this evening, I hope you see just how important the decision is whether you follow Jesus or whether you reject him. So please keep that passage in 2 Thessalonians open in front of you because we're going to jump about in these verses.

Looking first at the future of the wicked and then the future of the faithful. So the first thing we see in this passage is the future of the wicked. In verses 6 and in verses 8 and 9.

[5 : 14] The future of the wicked. Now the world is full of stories of people who've gotten away with atrocities against others. You see it on a global level.

Wars being fought out of selfishness of one man or of one nation. History is full of powerful figures who were responsible for killing thousands upon thousands of people and they thought they were untouchable.

It's easy for people to think that they might be above the rules because they have power, that they won't suffer any consequences for their actions. And so they oppress. They persecute.

They hurt those who don't quite fit with their agenda or with their goals. That's the context of the Thessalonian church, isn't it? These Christians were coming under attack, suffering at the hands of wicked people.

These Christians were living counter-cultural lives. They were different. The people in this church had changed. They'd started living for Jesus. And so the community around this church began to hate them.

[6 : 24] And they probably thought that they were going to get away with it because after all, the church is the minority in this situation. But look at what Paul says in verse 6.

Read that with me. God is just. He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you. Paul is encouraging these suffering Christians by saying, don't worry, God is not blind.

He has seen all of your afflictions, all of your pain, all of your suffering for his name, and he will bring justice. Now the judgment that's predicted here in these verses is God's ultimate judgment on that final day.

When all of humanity will stand before him. God is not blind to the goings-on of this world and how people treat Christians and how they respond to God.

And in these verses about God's judgment, we see three things about God's judgment that give us a holistic picture of the future of the wicked as they will suffer under God's judgment.

[7 : 31] The first is that God is just. Verse 6 says, God is just. He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you. Now God being just isn't a simple characteristic.

of how he acts. God is the very definition of justice. It means that he is perfectly righteous and good in how he responds to his creation.

As human beings, we love justice and we hate it when injustice rules. We get angry when we see people getting away with things they've done wrong. Committing evil deeds and yet walking away scot-free.

When we look at atrocities committed against people, we rightly cry out for injustice. We rightly cry out for justice, sorry. When we think about God being just, we need to remember that God is the very standard of what justice is.

Because when we cry out for justice, it's normally out of a sense that we've been wronged and we want revenge. We were hurt.

[8 : 38] And so, with impatience, we cry out for justice and we want it right now. We don't want it in six months or a year or ten years. We want it now. Our justice can be a bit like that of a child who justifies punching their brother because they did it to me first.

But God is not like us. His punishment and judgment on those who stand against him isn't revenge. He doesn't stand in heaven rubbing his hands eagerly with joy waiting for the day that he can finally get back at evil people.

But God's judgment comes out of his desire for justice. God has made it clear how his creation should and can live in harmony with him.

And out of love throughout history God has called us a rebellious humanity to turn from our sin and be made right with him. But we reject God.

That is our natural inclination. The Bible says in Romans 3.23 that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Elsewhere in Romans it says no one is righteous.

[9 : 49] No, not one. God being just means that something needed to happen. There needed to be judgment. But God being perfectly just made a way for people to be saved by putting the judgment on his son.

So all those who put their trust in Jesus are free from that judgment. Because of our sin all of humanity is under the sentence of death in rebellion against God and deserving of his judgment.

But for the Christian there is freedom because Jesus has paid the price. Jesus stood in our place and we'll come to celebrate that later on in our service together but for now I want us to see that for God to be just all rebellion and rejection of him must be punished.

without justice sin would run unchecked and evil would reign but God being perfectly just and perfectly loving sets the standard of what true justice is.

God's judgment is just. And the second thing about the future of the wicked and God's judgment is that it's frightening. Look at some of the words that Paul uses to describe God's judgment.

[11 : 11] I'll read the words from the ESV which is more of an accurate translation here. Verse 6 says that God will repay the affliction with affliction those who afflict you.

Verse 8 says that God will be revealed that Jesus will be revealed on that final day in flaming fire inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God.

and verse 9 says that they will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction. Now put yourself in the place of these Christians as they look out to their city and see people waiting to attack them.

It may seem that injustice has won but Paul says that God will have the last word on that final day when he brings judgment on those who are afflicting these Christians and those who do not know Jesus.

the words affliction vengeance and destruction as the ESV puts them they're frightening but Paul doesn't use them to scare people into becoming Christians.

[12 : 17] Paul is using these words to warn those in the church this is a letter to a local church he's warning those in the church those attacking the church from inside that this is their future if they do not repent from their sin and follow Jesus.

Paul is trying to encourage these hurting Christians to remember that God is not blind to their suffering he will act against those who are harming them but these words should also urge this church to go and tell people about Jesus because we don't want anyone to suffer under the judgment of God.

God's judgment is frightening and the last thing about the future of the wicked and God's judgment is that it is final read verses 8 to 9 with me he will punish those who do not know God and who 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 now Paul is a straight talker as he explains the ultimate future of every single person who does not respond in obedience to the gospel of Jesus for those who reject Jesus on that final day he will come as judge not as savior the question will be on that day how did you respond to Jesus in this life if you responded with faith and obedience you will have a glorious future that we will look at in a second but if you reject Jesus in this life and do not respond in obedience and follow him destruction and judgment awaits there will be no second chances no do-overs and so there is no time to waste if you want a

Christian if you do not know Jesus if you are not living for him then this future of judgment is what awaits you at the end an eternal destruction shut out from the presence of God the place we often call hell a place of eternal conscious suffering now approximately 178,000 people die a day and for many of them this is the future that awaits please consider the claims of Jesus tonight and do not waste another day on the road that leads to hell but put your trust in Jesus the Bible describes those who reject Jesus as wicked because we are all born in sin and rebellion against God we could never do enough to be good enough to be right with God on our own we can only be right with God through Jesus and our creator knows what is best he wants people to be right with him put your trust in

Jesus and live for him and this future that awaits the wicked should challenge us as Christians to take the gospel to this world that is dying and going to judgment without the saving knowledge of Jesus these are people in our homes people in our workplaces people in our neighborhoods in our streets people that we rub shoulders with every day we are the ones with the message that can bring hope the message that everyone needs to hear but we need to share it with them the message of the future of the wicked should also be a reminder to the suffering Christian that God is not blind he has not forgotten about or overlooked your suffering God is just as angered at our pain at the pain and suffering inflicted on his people as you are in fact God is more angered by it and it will not go unpunished the future of the wicked the future of all those who reject

[16 : 24] Jesus is God's judgment which is just frightening and final and the second thing I want us to see this evening from this passage is the future of the faithful in verses 6 and 7 and 10 and 12 the future of the faithful now in these verses we see marvelous truths that are specific to those who are suffering for the name of Jesus and because of their faith in him but we also see awe-inspiring truths of the reality of eternity that awaits every single Christian so if the first half of our time together was the hard news of the gospel the news of judgment and hell this is the good news forgiveness redemption perfect union with God and for us to share the true gospel the gospel the apostles preached the gospel that Jesus proclaimed then we need both sides of that coin both the good news and the hard news to read verses 6 to 7 with me

God is just he will pay back those trouble to those who trouble you 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 do you see that Paul is promising these Christians relief relief from their oppressors relief from persecution relief from suffering in the name of Jesus looking at their situation they probably didn't feel that that was ever going to happen they see the pain they feel the blow from the enemy they feel the attack that hits them on the back they see the physical dangers that surround them every day relief was probably the last thing they would have thought but Paul is inviting them to fix their eyes on eternal things on things that are unseen and to be comforted and notice how

Paul says they aren't in alone because he includes himself in this verse by saying we too long for this relief it's the idea of rest eternal rest and relief from the enemies of God and in the presence of God forever now this doesn't mean that all of our troubles in this life will go away it doesn't mean that there won't be any rest or relief in this life if you look throughout church history there were times of great persecution against Christians there were also times of peace and rest but can you imagine just how comforting this message of this promise of relief would be to this suffering church it's a bit like those scenes from the movies where a little kid is being pushed around on the playground by a group of bullies they're physically bigger than him they're stronger and they decide to combine forces and push the wee guy to the floor now at this point in the movies it's normally where the teacher jumps in or the hero of the story comes in but in that moment the main concern of the little kid on the floor is the sheer size of the bullies towering over him it's natural to look at the dangers that are right in front of your face use the things you can see but Paul is telling these Christians don't look at the bullies don't look at those oppressing you don't look at your persecutors in verse 7 Paul says look at your lives look at your persecutions from an eternal perspective and remember the relief and rest is yours in Christ there is hope because on that final day Jesus will come in blazing fire with his holy powerful angels as the end of verse 7 says now both of those images fire and angels are images that the Bible uses to describe judgment and the punishment of evil through these Christians will find relief

Paul is pointing them to their secure future in Jesus which will make when God will make his dwelling place with mankind those wonderful promises that on that day there will be no more crying no more pain no more death no more sin and we will Christians will live in the eternal glorious presence of God Paul says relief is coming and then he goes on in verses 10 to 12 read those with me on that 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 with this in mind we constantly pray for you that our God may make you worthy of his calling and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith we pray this so that the name of

Jesus Christ Jesus may be glorified in you and you in him according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ these verses speak of it the day that Jesus will return and the rewards that all Christians will receive there are rewards both for the now in this life and the not yet as we wait for the future to be materialized so let's first look at the rewards for the not yet let's look at verse 10 where it says 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 all the difficulties that we face in this life for the name of Jesus will fall into the background when we see the weight of eternal glory that awaits us it will make our problems disappear in this life but it will help us fix our eyes on Jesus even in the darkest of days the imagery of is of Jesus the king coming with crowds and crowds of people watching him it's a little bit like a bride walking into a church we had it here just a few months ago the groom standing up here with the pastor and then the music starts the crowd are told to stand for the bridal party and in comes the bride every single eye is on her little conversations in the pews everyone remarking just how beautiful she looks how wonderful the dress is and suddenly the minute the groom sees the bride all the nerves are gone the stress of the day the stress of preparations fall away as he stands and looks at his beautiful bride and on that day when

[23 : 29] Jesus comes all of his people will look at him with awe and marvel at his splendor and glory and you see what Paul says verse 10 this includes you Paul is saying look to the future return of Jesus and be encouraged be strengthened in your faith because you know that you will be with him for eternity so if that's the not yet element of these glorious truths then Paul goes on to speak about what it means for the lives of Christians every day in verses 11 to 12 Paul says in light of the truth of that glorious future from verse 10 that he constantly prays for the Thessalonian church for their day to day now what does he pray verse 11 that our God may make you worthy of his calling verse 11 that by his power he may spring to fruition your every desire for goodness verse 12 that Jesus may be glorified in them these are things that we can pray for one another and we should pray for one another things that we can pray for the persecuted church and that we can pray for ourselves as believers now I would encourage you to take these three things from verses 11 and 12 and pray for three

Christians this week use the language of the Bible and pray that God would work in the lives of those three people who are close to you and dear to you it will be a massive encouragement to them text them when you say you're praying for them as well these prayers of Paul show the importance of how the truth of the Christian faith should impact our daily lives the future promises of eternal glory must be met with practical everyday obedience in the Christian life as we eagerly long for heaven and look to the glorious future that awaits every Christian we need to remember that we still have work to do here and we must continue to serve Jesus every day until the day that he returns or we're called home now how are we made worthy of our calling as verse 11 says well we don't live the Christian life we don't obey God in order to be saved that's only possible through

Jesus but we live the Christian life the obedient Christian life out of thankfulness and praise for what God has already done for us in Jesus we respond to what God has done out of thankfulness to him all of the work that we should be doing as a church and as individual Christians should be out of a desire to see God glorified to see Jesus glorified our faith being worked out as a declaration of praise to our great God which in turn will be a witness to the watching world around us because we're constantly pointing people to Jesus it's that same attitude of John the Baptist who in John 3 30 said that Jesus and his fame must increase and John and his fame his ministry must decrease because Jesus is the focus of his life the life of a Christian is one of humility that points to Jesus giving him all the glory as we wait for that wonderful day when we will see him and be in his presence forever so brothers and sisters look to the future that awaits you as a Christian be in awe of

Jesus and how amazing it will be to spend eternity in his presence and then put that faith into action every single day glorify him now as you serve this local church glorify Jesus as you come alongside one another and care for each other glorify Jesus as you take the gospel to the world that needs him and glorify Jesus by following God's word and living obedient lives full of growth as we eagerly await his return and pray these prayers for one another pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters across the world live daily for the glory of God by the power of the spirit and point people to Christ share the gospel freely because only in Jesus can hope be found and no one can go too far for forgiveness no one can out sin God's grace no one is beyond the love of God but how will they know that if no one tells them we may not live in Afghanistan with the

Taliban going door-to-door hunting Christians we may not be in Iran where we need to hide and meet in secret but we are in a spiritual battle where the world lives and breathes a hatred for God and for Christians that can and often does result in persecution and the oppression of Christians how do we respond to that we need to remember that God is not blind and we need to remember that there is not a second of suffering that his people endure for his name that he doesn't see and that doesn't grieve him we need to remember that there are two futures the future of the wicked and of judgment and eternal separation from God in hell and a future of the faithful one of glorious union with Jesus that will last forever that future should impact how we live now how we serve one another and how we think about pointing people to

[29 : 20] Jesus with every opportunity we have let's pray together heavenly father we thank you for your word we thank you that you have given us all that we need to know to obey you all that we need to know to respond with obedience to the gospel father this evening we have covered both the hard news and the good news and I pray that if we need to be unsettled that you would unsettle us and settle us with the truth of judgment of sin and of a life without you but father would you also comfort us that there is hope there is life that there is eternal life in your perfect presence through Jesus Christ and father would you help us live obediently to the gospel every single day and point people to Jesus that is what you've created us to do and help us serve you well by lifting the name of Jesus above every other name for the upbuilding of your kingdom and for the glory of Christ we pray amen