

Justice Will Prevail
2 Thessalonians 1:5-10
Part Two

Last week I shared with you the biblical standard of justice for the crime of murder. Hopefully you still remember. What did God say in **Genesis 9:6**? **“Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed.”** Anything less than this would not be consistent with the biblical standard of justice. We therefore conclude if there were 20,000 murderers responsible for over 22,000 murders, such was the case in 1994, then there should have been 20,000 executions in 1994. But how many were there? 31. We are thankful for those who are responsible for establishing and carrying out our laws knowing that according to **Romans 13** they are the servants of God. But even though they may be doing the best job that they can, we are falling far short of true justice.

But let us take heart. There is a day coming when this world will experience perfect justice. The passage we are now studying talks about that future day. Let us read **2 Thessalonians 1:5-10**, **“For this is the plain indication of God’s righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. (6) For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, (7) and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, (8) dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, (10) when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed- for our testimony to you was believed.”**

The Thessalonians were suffering various persecutions and afflictions for their faith. Rather than being intimidated by these difficulties and shrinking back to a place of safety, they continued to share the gospel and to share the gospel boldly. Rather than striking back at their persecutors, they endured these difficulties patiently.

Verse 5 tells us that their patient endurance is **“a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment.”** Their patient endurance is a plain indication of God’s abiding grace operating within them. They are not facing these trials alone. The Lord is certainly with them in the midst of these trials. And therefore you can be assured that these wicked acts against them will not be overlooked. Then Paul goes on to describe the 2nd Advent of Christ when He will be unveiled or uncovered to the world and this righteous judgment performed.

How does he describe this uncovering? Paul tells us that when Christ is unveiled for the world to see, He will come from heaven, with His mighty angels, and in flaming fire. In other words, He will be unveiled or uncovered as God.

Certainly as the world sees Jesus uncovered or unveiled in this way they will know that there will be some pretty significant things taking place and the Lord does not disappoint.

THE RESULTS OF THE UNVEILING

The first result is retribution. Let us look at **Verse 6**, “**For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you.**” And then **VV. 8-9**, “**dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.**” In **V.6** it tells us that God is going to “**repay.**” In **V. 8** it tells us that God will “**deal out retribution.**” In **V. 9** it says that certain people will “**pay the penalty.**” In other words, God is in the business of punishing wrongdoers. And he certainly takes this business very seriously.

Is this consistent with your view of Jesus? Hopefully it is. No view of God is correct unless it includes the certainty of punishment or vengeance. In **Isaiah 66:15** it says, “**the Lord is the avenger.**” We must understand that the Lord will bring vengeance upon the sinner who rejects Him and His Word. In **Isaiah 59** the prophet explains why God’s promised blessings had not fallen on Israel. And then Isaiah says in the latter part of **V. 15**, “**Now the Lord saw, and it was displeasing in His sight that there was no justice? Where? In Israel. Then it says in V. 16, “And He saw that there was no man, and was astonished that there was no one to intercede.**” In other words He was disturbed that there was no man in Israel who possessed the character or the ability to stem the tide of evil among His chosen people.

As a result God prepares Himself for judicial intervention. “**Then His own arm brought salvation to Him; and His righteousness upheld Him. (17) And He put on the righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; and He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped Himself with zeal as a mantle.**” We cannot have a proper of view of God unless its makes room for retribution and vengeance for the punishment of evildoers.

In our examination of this particular result we will discover the answer to three basic questions. The first of those questions is:

WHY?

Look at **V. 6** “**For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you.**” Why? Because it is just. There is no option for Him. In **Deuteronomy 32:3-4** it says, “**For I proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just.**” In **Psalms 97:2** it says, “**Clouds and thick darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice’ are the foundation of His throne.**” Why will Christ come in vengeance when he is unveiled? Because He is just.

Let me ask you a question. Apart from Christ, who do we see in this passage justly exercising vengeance upon the wicked? is it ever right for us as men to exercise vengeance or punishment? The answer to that question would have to be yes! And this would be in a judicial setting. What does **Romans 13:1-4** tell us? “**Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.**”

(2) Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. (3) For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; (4) For it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil.”

Not only is God referred to as an avenger in the Scriptures, but also governing authorities. Our law enforcement agencies and judicial system do not only have the right to avenge, they have the responsibility before God.

We however as we individual Christians or as a church are not here to punish the people of our community for their sins. Certainly the civil authorities according to **Romans 13** have a responsibility to be an avenging arm of justice, but not us. In **Romans 12:19-21** it says, **“Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. (20) But if your enemy is hungry, feed Him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. (21) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”** There is no room in the Christian community for vigilantism. But only for love and good works.

Does this make us indifferent to justice? I certainly hope not. We need to pray for those in authority that they will enact righteous laws, that they will enforce those laws faithfully, punishing those who perform evil. And we can pray to God for His just intervention in the affairs of man. This is frequently done in the Old Testament and certainly David did this frequently. Consider the words of David in **Psalm 54**, **“Save me, O God, by Thy name, and vindicate me by Thy power; (2) Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth. (3) For strangers have risen against me, and violent men have sought my life. They have not set God before them. (4) Behold God is my helper; The Lord is the sustainer of my soul. He will recompense the evil to my toes; Destroy them in thy faithfulness.”** Because David chose not to exercise vengeance does not mean that he did not believe in justice. Just because we are not to exercise vengeance does not mean we do not believe wicked acts should be avenged. Justice cannot be suspended. It must be exercised. But it is not to be exercised through us.

If punishment is going to be meted out, it is better for the Lord to do it. Not only because it is the only right thing based on the Scriptures, but it actually makes sense.

First of all, He is omniscient and knows all things. In the OJ criminal trial, the jury concluded that OJ was innocent beyond a reasonable doubt. However, the jury in the OJ civil trial concluded that on the basis of the preponderance of the evidence that he was responsible for the murders of Nicole and Ron Goldman. Who knows what the truth is? God knows. He knows everything. And He knows what we have done wrong and what we have done right.

Beyond this, whatever response that He gives to our crimes is a measured response. The punishment will perfectly fit the crime. It is a wonderful thing to know that if we accidentally cut God off in traffic that He would not pull up alongside our car and execute us.

Finally, not only would His punishment be based on truth. Not only would His punishment fit the crime, but He would take no pleasure in exacting the punishment. This is a major difference typically between us as humans and the Lord. The Lord takes no pleasure in exacting vengeance or retribution. Repeatedly in the Scriptures we are told that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (**Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11**).

When Christ is unveiled for the world, He will come to exact vengeance. He will come in retribution. He will come to punish. This is the first of the two results of the uncovering or unveiling that we will examine. The next question we want to ask is who? On whom does this vengeance fall?

WHO?

Let us again look at **V. 6**, “**For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you.**” As Christians we are to forgive our enemies. We are to love our enemies. We are not to seek personal vengeance. But this does not mean that every sinful act against us will not be avenged. It is a tragic thing when believers retaliate against those who are causing them grief. If is ultimately saying, “I do not believe God.”

Those who are afflicting us will be afflicted. Anyone that chooses to inflict pain on a believer in any shape or form will be afflicted by the Lord. Anyone who attacks Christians is vulnerable. This is the same principle that God established for the Jewish people. In **Genesis 12** the Lord told Abraham, “**I will bless those who bless you and the ones who curse you I will curse.**” Christ continued these teaching in **Matthew 18** when He spoke concerning the treatment of His disciples. “**But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.**” May God have mercy on those who mess with us!

When we are sinned against we are responsible to forgive just as we have been forgiven. **Ephesians 4:32** tells us that we are to be “**kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**” There is no place for wrath on our part toward those who have sinned against us. What does the Scriptures teach us? In **1 Corinthians 4:12-13** it says, “**When we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate.**” This is what we are to do.

Consider Jesus on the cross. What do we see Him doing as He is afflicted and persecuted? He prays for them and says, “**Father forgive them for they know not what they do.**” This prayer is born out of a heart of love. And this is exactly how it should be with us. Those who afflict us are facing certain judgment. Why? Because it is just. What does **V. 6** tell us? “**For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you.**”

Consider what is awaiting those who persecuted and crucified Jesus. Jesus knows this and prays for them. We can be assured that when any of those individuals that crucified Jesus confessed their sin and embraced Him as their Savior and Lord, they would be forgiven of their sins. Even

the sin of crucifying the Lord of glory. But if they did not, they faced certain judgment. There is no less certainty in respect to those who afflict us.

CONCLUSION

If this is so, then can't we exercise the same mercy in our relationships with One another? If there is anyone here this morning who is holding anger against someone who has sinned against you, forgive them just as Christ has forgiven you. Put aside your anger and your bitterness. And feel compassion for them. For God **“will repay with affliction those who afflict you.”**