

November 10, 2019

Last Judgment

Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church

Welcome Home: Where You Are Perfectly Safe

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 (NIV)

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. 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.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

There was a special dedication service planned for the end of October this year. A building had been completed for the training of Lutheran pastors. Representatives from local churches and not so local churches made their way to Ethiopia to celebrate and thank the Lord for the new training facility and encourage the teachers and students. However, this joyous occasion was canceled. Political unrest broke out into rioting in Ethiopia. The U.S. State Department urged all Americans to return to the safety of the capital, Addis Ababa. The news release from our synod states:

“After some rather close encounters with armed mobs, World Missions Administrator Larry Schlomer and Professor Emeritus Forrest Bivens, who were already in Ethiopia for the planned events, were able to follow WELS Risk Management's plans and make their way safely out of the country. WELS President Mark Schroeder, who arrived in Ethiopia just as the rioting began, was also able to return safely to the United States. All representatives from other African countries and WELS missionaries were also able to depart safely.”

Over 60 people were killed in the rioting with hundreds more injured. Random, senseless, needless violence destroyed many lives and caused suffering to many more. While this violence was not directed at Christians in particular, it certainly affected Christians and the celebration of a new Lutheran training facility. When these situations happen, one might wonder if God is going to do anything about those who brought about such violence or if God will do anything to bring relief to those who are suffering. One might wonder where we can be perfectly safe.

We are not perfectly safe in the car because of accidents. Home might feel like the safest place but it is also said that home is where the most accidents happen, usually from falls. We are safe at work and school and shopping and at church, but not perfectly safe as accidents and violence have touched these places too. I don't mean to depress you this morning, but there are not many places where we are perfectly safe. Only in our Father's family. Our God has welcomed us back into his family through our Brother, Jesus Christ. We are perfectly safe in God's family because God will deal with those who cause trouble and give relief to those who are troubled.

God Will Deal With Those Who Cause Trouble

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you.

Paul knows that the believers in Thessalonica are facing trouble from the unbelieving Jews. Paul experienced it first hand. When he arrived in the city, he preached on three Saturdays in the synagogue. Some of the Jews believed Paul's message that Jesus is the Christ who died and rose to save them. But after only three weeks, some of the other Jews rounded up some bad characters in the marketplace and started a riot against Paul and the believers. Paul was forced to flee the city that night. But the believers in Thessalonica would have faced continual trouble from the Jews who did not believe in Christ. And these enemies of Christ were persistent. They found out that Paul had gone about 45 miles away to a city named Berea. So they went to Berea and drove Paul from that city as well.

Now think of those new believers back in Thessalonica. The enemies of Christ are serious and not afraid to start a riot. Are you safe in your home? Is your business safe from boycott or vandalism? Is your family safe going to the market? Why suffer in this way for believing in Christ? It would be easier to go back to your old ways and be safe in this world. Paul knows that the new believers would be tempted to give up Christ to achieve some measure of earthly safety and relief from suffering. So he writes:

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you.

And the believers had to be thinking, "When?" That's what we wonder when we are suffering. When will God make things right and punish those who continue to bring death and suffering in places like Ethiopia, South Sudan and Eritrea? When will God bring justice to those who attack Christians with weapons and with words? When will God give trouble to all who trouble his people? Paul gives us a clear answer:

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.

Judgment Day. The Last Day. That is when God will make everything right and he will be shown to be perfectly just. Those who do not know God and do not believe the gospel of Jesus will receive everything they have earned on that day. They will receive more than trouble for the trouble and suffering they have given. When our WELS pastors go somewhere to celebrate the dedication of a building, they can be stopped by a riot. When Paul goes to a city to proclaim the gospel of Jesus, he can be driven away by a riot. But when Jesus returns from heaven, no enemy will stand against him. He will come in power with his powerful angels.

Unbelievers will be judged according to their works on that day and all they will have to show the Holy God is their sin and rejection of the only Savior. Paul gives a sobering description of their sentence of hell.

They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.

Those who reject Christ will not only be without the goodness and love of God forever, but they will receive trouble forever for the trouble they have caused. They will be punished with everlasting destruction. God is just.

As believers, we do not get joy from the eternal destruction of unbelievers. But Paul tells us this so that

we can persevere through the suffering of this world. God will deal with those who cause me trouble. I don't have to make things right. I don't have to get revenge. I don't have to hold a grudge. If that person refuses to repent and trust in Christ, God will deal with them. We trust God to be just.

God Will Give Relief to Those Who Are Troubled

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.

When we look at the evil in the world around us, we pray for relief. Relief from violence. Relief from pressure to conform to the wickedness of the world. Relief from our own sins. Relief from the temptations of the devil. Relief from disease and relief from death. In some ways and at some times, God grants relief to his family.

Those who steal and harm and kill may be brought to justice by the governments of this world. There is temporary relief when a criminal is brought to earthly justice. Our Father in heaven may bring relief to those suffering sickness and disease by healing them, either with medical means or by his own means. But this is also temporary, for eventually death comes to all because all have sinned. Our God does bring us relief from our own sin. This morning we received that relief through the absolution and will receive forgiveness through Holy Communion. He gives us relief each day as we daily repent and remember our baptism when the Holy Spirit washed our sins away. But we need to keep hearing and receiving this relief of forgiveness because sin and temptation keep invading our lives. When will we be perfectly safe from violence, perfectly safe from the devil, perfectly safe from sin, perfectly safe from disease and death?

This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.... on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.

The Last Day will bring trouble to unbelievers but relief to believers. When Jesus appears in blazing fire with his powerful angels, we who believe will not be frightened. In fact, that is the day we will be the safest. For every enemy will be permanently defeated, judged and destroyed on that day. On that day we will also be judged and found to be not guilty of any sin for every sin was paid by Christ. On that day we will be invited through the gates of heaven where there is no more sin, no more death, no more mourning. So on that day, believers will glorify Christ. On that day, all believers will marvel at our Savior. For on that day we will be perfectly safe.

We thank the Lord that that our missionaries, WELS officials and others who were in Ethiopia to dedicate the new Lutheran training facility are safe. But if some had been caught in the violence, they still would have been perfectly safe in their Father's family. Even when we suffer in this world in any way, we are also perfectly safe in our Father's family. For we are "convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39). Paul says, "*This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.*"

Amen.