

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

⁵This is evidence of God's righteous verdict that resulted in your being counted worthy of God's kingdom, for which you also suffer. ⁶Certainly, it is right for God to repay trouble to those who trouble you, ⁷and to give relief to you, who are troubled along with us. When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his powerful angels, ⁸he will exercise vengeance in flaming fire on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹Such people will receive a just penalty: eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from his glorious strength, ¹⁰on that day when he comes to be glorified among his saints, and to be marveled at among all those who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

Counted Worthy of God's Kingdom

I.

Insurrection. That was the accusation made about the Thessalonian Christians made by the Jews living there. Insurrection against the Roman government, to be specific.

Paul and Silas had preached about Jesus in Thessalonica. They proclaimed that Jesus was the Christ—the Messiah promised by God to his Old Testament people. As has been done so easily throughout history, the unbelieving Jews took a sliver of what Paul and Silas were talking about and amplified it to make it something they could use as an accusation against the believers.

They said of Paul and Silas' message: "They are all acting contrary to Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, Jesus!" (Acts 17:7, EHV). It was a deliberate attempt to inflame the residents, both Jews and Thessalonians who had not yet become Christian, to think that the Christians there were attempting an insurrection—a rebellion against Rome. If the Christians were truly talking about a King other than Caesar, they could accuse them of treason.

It worked—at least to an extent. Three weeks after Paul and Silas had arrived in Thessalonica they had to leave. Unbelief seemed to have won.

Though Paul was the focal point for the attacks against Christianity in Thessalonica, the persecution wouldn't stop just because Paul left town. Paul was concerned. How would the faith of these relatively new Christians hold up? Would they be able to withstand the pressure from every direction?

Paul sent Timothy back to encourage the new believers and to strengthen them. Timothy returned with a report. Not only had they remained strong in the face of persecution and adversity, the Thessalonian Christians had reached out with the gospel to Macedonia.

II.

Just before today's text Paul said: "We are always obligated to thank God for you...because your faith is growing more and more... ⁴So we ourselves boast about you...in regard to your patient endurance and faith in all your persecutions and in the trials that you are enduring" (2 Thessalonians 1:3-4, EHV). This group of Christians had faced some challenging times, to be sure. When mocked and ridiculed—or worse—for one's faith, it might be tempting to think God has abandoned you. Not so.

The Apostle Peter says something similar to Paul: "Dear friends, do not be surprised by the fiery trial that is happening among you to test you, as if something strange were happening to you.... ¹⁴If you are insulted in connection with the name of Christ, you are

blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.” (1 Peter 4:12, 14, EHV). In other words, being insulted because of Christ identifies you as a believer.

The patient endurance and faith exhibited under persecution from unbelievers “Is evidence of God’s righteous verdict that resulted in your being counted worthy of God’s kingdom, for which you also suffer” (2 Thessalonians 1:5, EHV).

Counted worthy of God’s kingdom. That reminds me of Abraham. “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3, EHV). It wasn’t Abraham’s righteous life that made him worthy, or gave him credit before God. Sometimes Abraham’s life wasn’t very righteous at all. What God credited as righteousness was Abraham’s faith—faith that was given by God.

That’s the way it is for every believer. Each of us is *counted* as worthy of God’s kingdom by God. God gives us the faith that he credits to us as righteousness.

III.

Meanwhile, while Christians suffer persecution, it seems as though others prosper. There seem to be no consequences for sin. Unbelievers demand tolerance of their unbelieving lifestyles. They push to normalize things God declares as sin, like killing the unborn, or sexual activity outside of marriage. They mock believers for making God a priority in our lives—attending worship and voluntarily returning a portion of what God has given to us in our offerings to continue the work of the Lord.

God has not forgotten unbelief. “Certainly, it is right for God to repay trouble to those who trouble you” (2 Thessalonians 1:6, EHV). Though it seems unbelievers just keep going through life with no consequences, they will be held accountable, especially for their actions against believers.

Unbelievers are not just mocking *you*, they mock God. The punishment for mocking God is severe: “When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his powerful angels, ⁸he will exercise vengeance in flaming fire on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹Such people will receive a just penalty: eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from his glorious strength” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, EHV).

During every person’s lifetime they all have the same opportunity to believe in Jesus as their Savior. When Judgment Day arrives, or when they die in unbelief, their time is up. Everlasting destruction awaits those who tormented Christians during this life.

The greatest torment of all is that they will be away from the presence of the Lord and his glorious strength. In the end they will know the truth, but it will be too late. For all eternity they will see God far away and long to be with him, but will be unable to fulfill that dream.

The greatest torment of all to unbelievers will be that they finally understand who the true God is and what he has done for them. Their whole life was spent rejecting God’s love and salvation.

IV.

These verses of our text contain a most severe warning to those who reject God and live in unbelief. When you read the lesson quickly, perhaps only God’s judgment against unbelievers jumps out at you. Woven in among all the threats to unbelievers is a comforting message of sure hope for believers. That’s actually Paul’s main message. God has a purpose for everything that happens to believers—even persecution. God *always* wants to draw his own closer to himself.

In today’s Gospel we heard Jesus speak about all kinds of things that regularly

happen—things that are signs we are living in the last days. He even says: “You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends. They will put some of you to death. ¹⁷You will be hated by all people for my name’s sake” (Luke 21:16-17, EHV). Certainly things have happened in the past few years that bring hatred to Christians when we stand up for the truth of God’s Word.

Jesus goes on: “But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹By patient endurance you will gain your lives” (Luke 21:18-19, EHV). God is in control, even when it seems that the world has defeated him. Your eternal future is secure, no matter what the world or those of the world might do to you.

“Certainly, it is right for God... ⁷ to give relief to you, who are troubled along with us” (2 Thessalonians 1:6-7, EHV). Relief is coming. The persecution will end. Paul doesn’t talk about what the relief will look like, but we know from the rest of Scripture. Last week John’s vision showed us the new heavens and the new earth that will be ours—an existence in which all the troubles of this life will have passed away, to be replaced by eternal joy as we live with Jesus.

As was mentioned, Paul weaves the coming glory for believers in with the warnings against unbelief. Right in with the warnings from verses 7-9, he breaks in with verse 10: “...on that day when he comes to be glorified among his saints, and to be marveled at among all those who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed” (2 Thessalonians 1:10, EHV). Paul wants to be sure we know that we will be with Jesus in glory at the last day. Believers will glorify Jesus on that day. Believers will marvel at the Lord Jesus for all he has done for us. This will happen for Christians because we have believed the message of Jesus as the Savior of the world.

Insurrection. That was the charge leveled against Paul and Silas and the believers in Thessalonica. Because they looked to Jesus as the long-promised Messiah who had now come, they were accused of insurrection against Caesar.

Jesus is our King, too. No matter what decisions are made by the world, no matter whether the politicians who won are those you chose, or what ballot proposals are enshrined in the constitution, Jesus is still our real ruler.

The Bible teaches us that Christians live in two kingdoms at the same time. We are citizens of the world. As such, we face challenges from the world. But we are also citizens of God’s Kingdom. We have been counted worthy of God’s kingdom because of our faith. God grant that we continue to show the same patient endurance and faith in persecutions and trials that the Thessalonians displayed. Amen.