November 15/16, 2025
Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost
St. Matthew's Lutheran Church
2 Thessalonians 1:5-10
Are You Looking Forward to Judgment Day?

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Copeland family sat in the courtroom, waiting. They had filtered in with everyone else after word quickly spread that the jury had finally reached a verdict after 3 days.

It had been over a year since Trent's life was tragically taken from them by a complete stranger in a fit of rage. Now, that stranger was intertwined into their family history. The Copelands were sure who that stranger was. He was sitting in the front of the courtroom on the other side of the aisle.

Trent's sister, Sarah, silently prayed. His brother, Daniel, sat stiff beside her. His parents gripped each other's hand as they stared at the floor. All they could do was wait and hope for the proper judgment. That's the only thing that could help them move on.

When the jury filed in, the room went still. The Copeland family turned their attention to the jury foreman. They had been waiting for this moment. And, at the same time, they weren't looking forward to it. Judgment lay in the authority of fellow human beings, easily swayed one way or another.

"Not guilty," the foreman said. The Copelands had waited over a year to hear a different statement, to get justice through judgment. Such a situation is heartbreaking and gut-wrenching. Justice and the peace that comes from it were so close, yet so far away. I'd never want to be in such a situation where justice through judgment is so uncertain. Would you?

Fast forward to Judgment Day. That's a whole different type of courtroom scene. A scene that burns like a furnace. The judge comes, and he's revealed in blazing fire with heavenly angels beside him. You're present on this day. You'll face judgment. So will your adversaries. Are you looking forward to that?

Let's calm any initial fears you may have about facing judgment. Yes, you will stand before God to be judged. But, you can be certain what the verdict will be. Despite your many sins, you will be declared not guilty because of Jesus. You receive the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation through faith in him as your Savior.

So, regarding your own judgment, listen to what we heard in our first lesson. **"For you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves."** And, remember what Jesus said in our gospel? **"Stand firm, and you will win life."** Are you looking forward to Judgment Day? In terms of your salvation from sin won for you by Jesus, the answer is "yes" because you are certain what God will say of you.

But, we're not done answering that question. In fact, we're just getting started. That knowledge is comforting and joyous enough. But, Paul gives us another reason to look forward to Judgment Day. The Lord will provide so much justice on that day.

It's nothing new that Christians endure persecution. It was certainly going on in Thessalonica, where Paul sent this letter and the one preceding it. Paul and his missionary companion Silas were driven out of Thessalonica by many who opposed the gospel. After they went to Berea, persecutors from Thessalonica followed them there and stirred up more trouble.

Certainly, you can imagine what was going on in Thessalonica even without Paul and Silas there. Christians who remained faithful to Jesus endured the same kind of treatment as Paul and Silas did, if not worse. There must have been intimidation, violence, loss of business and social standing, fear for their families and their future. How tempting to stray from the faith if this is what life would look like. How tempting to think, "If God loved his people, he would send justice ASAP instead of allowing the wicked to get away with their persecuting."

But, that's not how the Thessalonians responded. Not at all. Listen to verses 3 and 4 right before today's lesson. **"We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring."** (2 Thessalonians 1:3, 4). Right there is the evidence Paul refers to in the opening words of our lesson. That's the evidence of God's just judgment at the end of time. They faced the world and its persecution confident of God's judgment and justice to come. That's why they so boldly lived their faith.

Does the same go for you and me? It's no secret that Christianity, in general, is under attack around the world, and oftentimes, in our country regarding certain societal topics. And, it might feel like you're under attack, then, too. In a sense, that's accurate. A public attack on Christian values is, by extent, an attack on you. But, is that really the same as you being personally attacked for your perseverance in the faith? What I mean is this: how vocal are you with others about what you believe? Maybe we don't look forward to Judgment Day as much as we ought because we're actually living a decently cozy life. And, maybe, that's because we're not living and speaking out our faith as Jesus calls us to do. Have you ever considered it that way?

There's a reason for that thinking. I believe it's two-fold. We hide our faith a bit because we're nervous of the repercussions in this lifetime which blind our vision of the life to come when all types of persecution will be gone. But, perhaps the bigger issue is what the psalmists often struggled with. Justice doesn't come soon enough. It doesn't make sense to struggle so much when justice waits and waits and waits.

So, rather than looking forward to Judgment Day, we're tempted to look forward to tomorrow when we can wake up, have our devotion in the privacy of our homes, know inwardly that I'm a Christian, but hesitate to make sure others know about my faith and my biblical, godly values.

To be sure, salvation is through faith alone, no matter how strong or weak that faith might be. But, do we want to settle for as comfortable a life as possible when Christ calls us to strive for a life worthy of persecution? I know it sounds crazy, but when has Jesus' teachings ever made sense from a worldly perspective?

Live out your faith. Speak out with the truth. I guarantee you, because Jesus guarantees you, that persecution will find you. You'll lose some friends. You might lose a chance at a promotion. You might even get verbally attacked. Certainly, none of that is justice. But, God doesn't always promise justice here and now. That's ok. When has faith ever focused primarily on here and now? Doesn't faith look forward to the things unseen but already won in Jesus?

God's promise to provide justice on the last day gives you encouragement to boldly live out your faith and speak the truth. It gives you a deeper, greater anticipation and yearning for Judgment Day when all will be made right forevermore. Unlike the all-too real story of the Copeland family from the introduction, you know justice will come because you know who the Judge is, and he can't get it wrong. He will overrule any injustice that precedes the Day of Judgment.

With all this in mind, listen again to some of the words of our text. See if they take on new meaning for you. **"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…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."**

Justice is coming. So, don't be afraid to be bold with your faith. You will receive your reward in Jesus, which is far greater than any deceitful peace that might come as a result of being shy with your faith. Your enemies will receive their due payment for persecuting you, which is ultimately denying Jesus, the Savior of the world.

Within that truth, there's a tension, right? As Christians, we have the will of God in our hearts that all would come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved. Hearing the words of this lesson also causes us to be sad because we don't want to see anyone suffer eternally in hell. So, there's a tension here. While we rejoice that justice is coming, we're sad to see so many fail to believe.

To help ease this tension, that's also why we want to live out our faith. So, we can say, "I've done all I can to share Jesus with the people in my life." Rather than letting others do the work of evangelism, we all do it. Looking forward to Judgment Day gives us the confidence to do that. Justice is coming. Evil will be punished.

As you share your faith and persevere under persecution, you are leaving that person's soul up to God to judge. You've warned them of the coming wrath. If they fail to obey the gospel (which simply means to trust in Jesus alone for salvation), then they're really just getting what they wish for: that God judge them based on their actions. There will be justice. Find comfort in that truth.

Yes, we suffer now, and will continue to suffer just for the sake of being a Christian in the kingdom of God. We often talk of physical suffering helping us to look forward to heaven when all our aches and pains and diseases will be taken away. Spiritual suffering does the same, if not more. As you endure persecution in this world of sin, you get to look forward to hearing the Judge of all say of you "Not guilty." Those who troubled you so often will see you and hear of you and be amazed.

Because although you looked so meek and lowly, you will be glorified with Jesus and all those who believe in him. That's justice. Public recognition that you were right all along. Public recognition that the suffering was all worth it. Public recognition that there is no more trouble waiting for you. That's why we look forward to Judgment Day.

Such anticipation will give you the motivation to be like those early Christians in Thessalonica. By faith, you will gladly live for Jesus despite the world's opposition. By faith, you will eagerly await the amazement of heaven which is more than just waiting to enjoy the place prepared for you; it's enjoying the absence of persecution. By faith, you will face the evils of this sinful world, confident of God's judgment. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.