

**Second Sunday of End Time – Last Judgment**

November 10, 2013

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

***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. 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. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 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 and from the majesty of his power 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. (NIV)***

It's coming. The day will be here. There is no avoiding it because it is going to happen. I am talking about Judgment Day. I am referring to the day we confess is on the way every time we speak the Apostles' Creed, the day Jesus will come to judge all the living and the dead. Judgment Day is coming. Is this a good thing or a bad thing? Is this a day we long for, a day we wait for with eager expectation? Is it a day for which we cry "how long?" Or is this a day of terror and a day to dread? Is this a day that fills us with fear and much anxiety? Which is it? Is this a day which will bring comfort or a curse? Is this a day where we will find rest and relief from trouble, or a day that will start an eternity of being troubled?

It all depends on what side we are on, doesn't it? It all depends if we are truly ready to see God face to face, or if the day will catch us unprepared as it comes unexpectedly like a thief in the night. It all depends if we will be gathered among the sheep or the goats. It all depends on whether our final destination will be that of heaven or that of hell. But the truth remains – it is coming! On this day where our focus is on the Last Judgment, I pray we are certain about what side we are on. In this month when we will be taking a day for Thanksgiving, I want us to remember today our greatest blessing. Join me this morning to say: **Thank you Jesus for putting us on the good side of God's just judgment.**

The church in Thessalonica was known for several things. Two challenges they faced were dealing with poverty and also severe persecution. Yet, despite those troubles this church became a model for outreach. They boldly reached out to others with the gospel of Jesus. In the opening verses Paul thanks God, for as he writes: ***"your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing."*** Paul adds, ***"Therefore...we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring."*** The more the people displayed their faith in Jesus - the more they were persecuted. The more they showed their love for God and others in this world – the more they suffered.

Now Paul says something that might seem a bit odd. He writes, ***"All this is evidence that God's judgment is right."*** How is God's people suffering evidence that God's judgment is right? Don't we think the opposite? We often ask God why he allows His children to suffer.

We question what is going on when we see the wicked prosper and unbelievers flourish. When the wicked persecute the righteous how is this evidence that God's judgment is right? First of all, the Lord tells us this will happen in this world. The world will hate us because of Jesus. The apostle Peter writes: ***"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ,...if you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you"*** (1 Peter 4). Secondly, God sees the big picture. He uses sufferings to test and strengthen faith in His people. The wicked, who appear to be prospering, really are not getting away with a single thing.

On the Last Day, all these things will be evidence that God's judgment is right. On this Day a clear line will be drawn for all to see. One side will be ***"counted worthy of the kingdom of God,"*** the other side ***"will be punished with everlasting destruction."*** One side will have relief from all the enemies that troubled them, the other side God will pay them back for the trouble they caused others. On one side the Lord will be ***"glorified in his holy people"*** and will be marveled at when they see the majesty of God and the heaven he prepared for them. On the other side the people will be ***"shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power."*** That's the worst part about hell – being separated from God forever.

Once again our feelings about Judgment Day all depend on what side you are on! Again this day is coming. ***"This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels."*** But how will the lines be determined? Who will be comforted with everlasting life and who will depart to eternal punishment? Are you worthy of eternal life? Perhaps this is what makes us a bit uncomfortable to talk about final judgment. How do you look standing in the presence of a holy God? If you are like me, you look a lot like a sinner. For this is what we are! We are unworthy. Jesus should come with a blazing fire and punish us. For this is what we deserve. If the lines on Judgment Day were drawn on a basis of us and what we have done, we would all be on side no one will want to be on.

Yes, there will be many people of the wrong side on that day. Paul writes, ***"He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."*** Why will there be people on the side of God's wrath? There are those who do not know God. They deny God exists. They refuse to acknowledge the truth about their Creator. Their foolish hearts are darkened and Christ in blazing fire will punish them. There may be others who perhaps had known God but only as the God of creation. They refuse to believe that it is by Christ's redeeming work alone that they are righteous. They do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They always want to add something to what Jesus did. In doing so they are denying Christ because as Paul writes in Romans, if their salvation was based on anything they do ***"then grace would no longer be grace."*** (11) It happens to be these very people persecuting the Christians in Thessalonica. They too will be punished with everlasting destruction.

Then why are we, like the Christians in Thessalonica, looking forward to the Last Day? Why when Jesus returns in blazing fire with all His powerful angels will we be able to lift up our heads in joy? What makes us so confident that when we see such things the day of our redemption is here? How do we know that we will be counted worthy of going to heaven? We have the good news. We have the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. The good news is Jesus became our righteousness. By His perfect life Jesus provided you and me the holiness we need to live with God, and the holiness we need to stand before God on the Day of Judgment. The good

news is all our sins are paid for and forgiven. God directs our eyes to the cross where Jesus suffered in our stead and died the death that we deserved. He points us to the cross where our salvation was won. The good news takes us to the empty grave of Jesus to show us how our enemies of sin, death, and the devil are defeated for us. On the Last Day all this will be clear for all to see!

This is why I ask you to join me this morning to do one simple thing. Tell Jesus thank you. Thank Jesus for putting us on the good side of God's just judgment. A thank you to Jesus is really all saving faith is – it is recognizing Jesus has already done it all. It is looking at Jesus' life and death and saying thank you. It is looking at Jesus' resurrection and saying thank you. When we say thank you Jesus this is what obeying the gospel of Jesus is all about. It is just saying thanks noting we have done nothing and Jesus has done everything.

It's coming. The day will be here. How do we view this Day? Everything depends on what side we are on. Thank you Jesus for putting us on the good side of God's just judgment! On the Last Day I know I will stand with Jesus in victory. ***"This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you."*** How can we ever thank Jesus enough? I pray we try with faith and love every day. Amen.