



Season of Pentecost

11/16/2025

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

Perfect Justice

You can learn a lot about the people around you and the times you live in by looking at the stories they tell. It's pretty safe to say that in America today, the most popular stories are superhero stories. And of the superheroes, the one who has been around the longest, and who has gotten the most movies, is Batman.

Why? Batman is just a guy in a grey suit who goes around punching people. So what's the appeal? Put simply, it's the fact that he brings justice without limitations. When Batman investigates a crime, he doesn't have to wait around for a search warrant. He isn't held back by bureaucracy and red tape. He goes into the most dangerous places, and gets the job done. His real identity is a secret, which means that no one can buy him off – he's incorruptible. If a person is in a dangerous situation, the police might not be able to respond in time. But in the stories, Batman is always watching, always ready to swoop down from the shadows and help the people who need it the most.

But in real life, there is no Batman. So when bad things happen, is there anyone strong enough to really protect us? Does anyone care? Does anyone see?

Look at the world around you. Most of the time, it feels like the answer is NO. You go through the pages of human history, and see one atrocity after another. You read the headlines, and feel sick to your stomach. Maybe there's even things that have happened to you personally that you would rather not remember. Will justice be done? Will the wicked ever be called to account for their actions? Is there no one who will do something about the evil in the world around us?

Those are not new questions. The Christians in Thessalonica felt that way too. From the start, people in their congregation had a tough go. We hear about the Apostle Paul's visit to the city in Acts 17. He was able to preach, lots of people believed the gospel message. But opposition started very quickly. People in the congregation were falsely accused, publicly shamed and fined. Things got so bad that the people in this congregation sent Paul away after he had only been there for three weeks, but even after the Apostle left the persecution continued. We don't know all the details, but most likely the shaming and fines had continued. It's possible some of these Christians were being beaten, or even killed.

We know from other parts of Paul's letters that these Christians had stood firm during the persecution that was coming their way. But that doesn't mean they didn't have any temptations at all. I'm sure there were times where some of the people in the congregation were tempted to think: "If God really cared, if we were really his children, wouldn't he do something to put an end to all this? Is he powerful to protect us? Can we be sure he loves us after all?" There could have been others in the church who were tempted a different way, thinking: "Maybe the fact that the Lord hasn't intervened is a call to action – we need to band together, fight back, and take matters into our own hands!"

Paul answers those questions by pointing the Thessalonians to a bit of an unusual place: Judgment Day. The Day of God's Wrath. Listen again to some of the details [READ]. Probably not where you would expect to find encouragement! So where's the comfort?

Think of it this way. Imagine you are a soldier on the front lines of a war. A firefight breaks out. You are pinned down, the enemy is coming at you from every direction, and it doesn't seem like you can hold on for much longer. But then you hear a message over the radio: "We heard your distress call. Air support is on it's way. There will be an air strike on the enemy position in 90 seconds." I'm sure there are plenty of situations where hearing that missiles are headed your general direction would be very bad news! But if you're a soldier in that position? That's probably the best news you could possibly hear.

That's the kind of encouragement that Paul wants to give the Thessalonians, these saints under fire. He reminds them: God is powerful. He sees the evil in the world... And he gives evil an expiration date. He knows that human institutions don't always get things right, and can be corrupted themselves. So he promises to come into the world and make everything right. His justice will not fail!

But notice this, too. God is the one who gets this important work done. God does it in his time, and in his way.

That has some important implications for the Thessalonians, and for us too.

First, it means that when we feel anger over the injustice in the world, or even over terrible things that are done to us personally, we hand that anger over to the Lord. That doesn't mean you can't do anything when bad things happen. If someone tries to break into your house, call the police. If someone steals from you, take them to court. God has blessed us with judges and police officers, and he does want us to use them. But as Christians, we can never take matters into our own hands. "Vengeance is mine" says the Lord. Even if legal protections fail, you still have God on your side. Take your needs to him in prayer. Say, "Lord, I know your justice never fails. Please be faithful to your promises. Help me as I wait for you to deal with this in your perfect time and your perfect way. I trust you!"

But it's also a call to watch ourselves. There are certain sinful behaviors that make your skin crawl when you hear about them. That's a good thing! But watch your blind spots. Satan wants you to walk away from the faith and burn in the fires of God's judgment with him. He also knows that his time is short. So he constantly probes Christians for weaknesses. And wherever your fences are lowest, that's where you can expect him to show up.

So if you're disgusted by alcohol, the devil isn't going to waste his time tempting you to be an alcoholic. But he might tempt you to be greedy, or prideful, or lustful. He tries to hit you with temptations that seem attractive to you! So that disgust you feel when you look at the evil in the world around you? Use that disgust on yourself. When you're on the road, and you're tempted to fly into a rage and seethe and curse at all the drivers around you, think: "This temptation is coming from the same devil who tempts people to murder, and shoot up schools, and commit atrocities. Am I going to side with him? No way." When you're online, and scroll past a picture that tempts you to lust, think, "This is from the devil who lures people into ruining their families, to abusing wives and children. I would rather die than give him the satisfaction of falling for something sick like this." When a temptation seems attractive, remember how disgusting and vile sin really is.

All of these things require patience and endurance. Where do we find the strength for these difficult tasks? We find it only as we run back to God's promises, recorded for us in the Bible. In the opening pages of Scripture, God promises to send a Savior into the world. 2000 years ago, Jesus came. God promises to take our sins away, to forgive us all the things we've done wrong. And Jesus went to the cross. All the fire of God's wrath that we deserved was poured out on him. Because of what he has done, our sins are gone! God's promises have not failed one single time! That's true for the Last Day too. We know that God will keep his promise to bring justice, and that means heaven will be safe and secure forever. His promise to see you face to face. To be close to you forever. God keeps all those promises because he loves you. We can trust him!

There is plenty of comfort to be found in Judgment Day. But there is something else we want to keep in mind too. As we look ahead to Christ's return, we need to remember we don't want anyone to be on the receiving end of God's wrath. God doesn't even want that! [I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked]. So let's make sure we aren't taking pleasure in the death of the wicked.

If you want to see an example, just look at the guy who wrote these words in the first place! The Apostle Paul did not start off as a believer. He was an enemy of the church, and was actually tasked with hunting down Christians and punishing them for following Jesus. But then, one day as he was heading towards Damascus to hunt down more believers, Jesus himself appeared to him. Paul, at that time known as Saul, was knocked from his horse, struck blind, and had to be led into the city by the rest of his followers.

But God wasn't done with him. The Lord appeared to one of the Christians living in Damascus, a man by the name of Ananias. He told him, [READ section where he tells him to baptize Saul]. But listen to the reply Ananias gives! [READ] Now Ananias did not outright say "no" to God, but you can hear the hesitation in his words. The Bible doesn't record his exact thoughts in this moment, but allow a little sanctified speculation. Is it possible that he didn't want Saul to become Christian? That he thought that if Saul was baptized, that would mean he was never punished for the terrible things he had done? Is it possible Ananias was thinking, "Lord, don't convert this guy. Condemn him! Give him what he deserves!" Whatever his hesitation was, God isn't interested in entertaining it. He says: [READ]

God's grace was for Saul too. Ananias needed to hear that. So did the Thessalonians. In these verses, Paul reminds them of God's justice and faithfulness. But he doesn't say, "Sit back and relax! Unbelievers are doomed anyway!" No! The gospel was for sinners like them. It was for sinners who persecuted the church, like Paul did before he was an Apostle. And that means the gospel was for the people persecuting the Thessalonians too.

Just think of the witness the Thessalonians were able to give the other people in their city as they loved each other, trusted God, and suffered patiently. Some of those persecutors might have thought, "Nobody acts like this under distress. What do these people have that I don't? What kind of God is it that they worship anyway?" The Holy Spirit used their suffering to point more people to his Word.

The same is true today. You can probably think of people in your life who ferociously oppose the gospel. Those are people to keep at the top of your personal evangelism list. Keep praying for them. Don't give up. Don't stop witnessing. Know that no matter what happens, Jesus wins in the end. And that means you really have nothing to lose!

You can learn a lot about a person by the stories that they tell. So when we look at all the things God shares with us in the pages of his Word, what do we learn? We learn that even though human beings have sinned, though all of us have rebelled against him, he still loves us. He still forgives us. We learn that when he makes a promise to his people, he keeps it. We learn that he keeps our souls safe no matter what, and that what makes him more excited than anything is the thought of spending all eternity with you. Amen.