

“Hope in persecution” - 2 Thessalonians 1:6-12

The third Sunday of the Epiphany season – Jan 23, 2022

Holy Trinity Church - Tom Mount

Scripture reading – 2 Thessalonians 1:6-12

Introduction

- The purpose of this part of letter is to encourage the believers who were suffering persecution. At this time (AD 51), the persecution was localized and limited: there was not yet widespread killing of Christians. That would gradually change under Nero (54-68), Domitian (81-96), Marcus Aurelius (161-180), Decius (249-251) and Diocletian (284-305).
- We ended last week in vv. 3-5, where Paul commends for their perseverance. He says their persecution is proof that they are worthy of God’s kingdom.
- Today, in vv. 6-12, Paul gives them two additional reasons to be hopeful in their suffering (vv. 6-10) and lets them know how he is praying for them (vv.11-12). In the process, clarifies certain things about the second coming of Jesus.

Expect persecution!

- America since its founding is an anomaly in history of Church.
- Jesus and the apostles warned us that Christians would experience *thlipsis*, “tribulation,” due to persecution (Jn 16:33; Mk 10:29-30; Mt 24:4-25; 1 Ptr 4:12, et al.). This age is referred to as “the present evil age” (Gal 1:4). Satan rules as the “god of this world” controlling much of what takes place (2 Cor 4:4; cf. Eph 2:2; 1 Jn 5:19). The NT says there will be terrible times in these “last days” (1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:1; 4:3; Jude 18-19).
- Christians have been persecuted around the world since the 1st century. America, however, has been an oasis of religious freedom.
- But things are changing. During the last decade, there has been a growing hostility toward those who openly follow Christ, espouse biblical morality and traditional family values and who seek to protect the unborn and protect personal freedoms.

- The prevailing climate has changed and you and I need to adjust to the new normal. **Work for the best** (Pray, research, take action); **prepare for the worst** (be ready for escalating persecution). Cf. Neh 4:17.

Be encouraged!

“⁶ 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.”

1. **God will judge those who persecute Christians.** This is not a longing for revenge but an innate human longing for justice. Cf. Rev 6:10.
2. **God will relieve the suffering of those who are persecuted.** All sadness, injustice and lies will be forever gone. Cf. Rev 21:4.

“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.”

- **“blazing fire”.** A common OT trope signifying divine judgment. Cf: Dt 32:22; Isa 29:6; 30:27, 30, 33; 33:14; 66:24; Joel 2:30; Nah 1:6; Zep 1:8; 3:8; Mal 4:1; Acts 2:19; 2 Pet 3:7, 10; Rev 9:17-18; 16:8; 20:9.
- **“powerful angels”.** Another common feature of biblical judgment scenes. Cf: Zech 14:5; Matt 16:27; 24:30-31; 25:31; Mark 8:38; 1 Thess 3:13; Rev 19:14.
- **“he will punish those who don’t know God and do not obey the gospel”.** “Punish,” *ekdikesis*, does not mean irrational rage or a *quid pro quo* retaliation. It is God’s loving, just juridical action in making the world right again. Cf. Rom 1:21-22,28.
- **“everlasting destruction... shut out from the presence (*prosopon*, “face”) of the Lord”.** This is God honoring the choice of those who refuse to be in relationship with him. Cf. John 17:3; Ezek 33:11; Matt 11:28-30.
- **“glorified in his holy ones and marveled at among all those who have believed”.** His radiant splendor will be on display among his people and his angels and all believers will be astonished at the sight of him! Cf. Rev 5:6-14.

Prayer

¹¹ **“With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith.”**

1. **that our God may make you worthy of his calling.** God will continue his work of grace in your hearts to make you more like Jesus. Cf. Phil 1:6.
2. **that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith.** God will actualize all the dreams you have for loving and serving others. Cf. Ep 2:10.

¹² **“We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

- First: that the name of the Lord Jesus would be glorified in them. Irenaeus: “The glory of God is a human fully alive.”
- Second: that they (would be glorified) in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. That they would radiate the glory of Jesus.

Takeaway

Be alert to the signs of anti-Christian hostility around you this week and counter it with love, goodness, prayer and active faith and service!