

Live Your Life in View of Jesus' Return
Sermon on 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
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The Apostle Paul wrote early on: *I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.* That's our attitude today, too! Amen.

God's Word for our special consideration this morning is another installment of our summer sermon series on the Apostle Paul's first three epistles—this time, the third of those: Second Thessalonians, specifically chapter one, verses three through ten. This is Paul's greeting to the members of his church in Thessalonica:

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. 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.

This is God's Spirit-inspired Word of Jesus Christ.

Introduction: Often People's Self-Concept Depends on Others

Dear fellow Christians—who live your lives in view of Christ's return:

I'm sure most of you are well acquainted with the term "self-concept". I suppose you could define it this way: Our "self-concept" is what we think of ourselves. And a self-concept can range from very positive to very negative thoughts about ourselves.

Often people's self-concept depends upon what others think of them. That's why, as little children, a parent's unconditional love is so important to us. It's why, as we grow, our friends are so important to us, and peer pressure is so strong, and a bad reputation is so devastating. Even as adults, self-concept is important to us. It's a part of why people try to be good workers and good parents, and a part of why people value marriage—because other people's high estimation of us validates our good self-concept.

Now, a little bit along those same lines, have you ever wondered what your pastors think of you? Interesting question, isn't it?! And this morning I'm going to tell you what your pastors think of you—on the basis of Paul's words to his members at Thessalonica.

Theme: Live Your Life in View of Jesus' Return

In a little bit of a broader way in this section of Scripture, Paul is urging his people to: LIVE YOUR LIFE IN VIEW OF CHRIST'S RETURN. We'll hear that this means we need to (1) CONTINUE IN FAITH, LOVE, AND ENDURANCE, we need to (2) RECKON WITH CHRIST'S PUNISHMENT OF NON-CHRISTIANS, and we need to (3) TRUST GOD'S TESTIMONY IN THE BIBLE.

Part One: Continue in Your Faith, Love, and Endurance!

No doubt you recall that the Apostle Paul established this congregation in Thessalonica, in northern Greece, during his Second Missionary Journey. It would have been about twenty years after Jesus' death and resurrection for our salvation. It wasn't long afterwards, due to persecution by the Jewish people in Thessalonica, that Paul moved on—to the point that he was now about two hundred miles down the map, in southern Greece. But he wrote back to this congregation at Thessalonica twice. We have the two letters in the Bible: First and Second Thessalonians.

And Paul starts off his second letter to the Thessalonians this way. He says: *We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so.* So, was Paul's heart filled with apprehension, because he was far away? Was Paul's soul filled with anger, because he was driven from Thessalonica? Was it filled with guilt, because he couldn't stay among the Thessalonians for very long? No!

Paul was, above all things, thankful for the Thessalonians—and for three reasons. First: *because your FAITH is growing more and more.* Second: *and the LOVE every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about* – thirdly – *your PERSEVERANCE and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.* What was it that Pastor Paul appreciated in his Thessalonian members? – their faith, their love, and their perseverance.

And Paul comments further: *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.* Paul was saying: God will properly judge each of you righteous on the Final Day; after all, your faith, your love, and your endurance – especially in persecution; the Thessalonians were actively being persecuted for trusting in Jesus – all of these virtues demonstrate the confidence in Christ by which you are attached to God.

Pastor Paul was thankful for his Thessalonian members: because of their faith, their love, and their endurance. How about your pastors? What do they think of you?

We're thankful, too—really! Often, when I walk to work in the morning – no lie! – I marvel that I have the privilege of serving you with God's good news of Jesus. Always, when we're gathered in worship, I am delighted to see each and every one of you—no exceptions! Even when we run across each other at a crowded store or in a traffic jam on Main Street, if you're somebody I regularly see in worship, you instantly bring a smile to my face and my heart.

Why? Why are your pastors thankful for you—as Paul was for the Thessalonians? Is it because you pay me? No. I mean: I appreciate the compensation which enables me to continue freely to serve you, but: no. Is it because the great many of you gathered together in worship make us pastors boastfully proud? No. Is it because you all always behave so well? Of course not, and neither do we. No, instead, we pastors are thankful for you for the same reasons Pastor Paul was thankful for the Thessalonians. We're thankful for your faith, your love, and your endurance.

We're thankful that, when you're in church, it's strong evidence that you trust Jesus. And then, we know you're safe in Christ and in his salvation. And our souls, which are responsible for your souls, can rest at ease. We pastors are thankful for your love for one another: love that leads you to meet together week by week, love that leads you to sing and confess and listen together week after week, love that leads you to pray together every week. And we're thankful for your endurance. Although we don't face the sort of overt persecution the Thessalonians faced, still it's very contrary to our culture for us to get together regularly in worship. And yet you do it. And we are very thankful.

Part Two: Reckon with Christ's Punishment of Non-Christians!

I might add that all of this is also quite essential! We need to continue in faith, love, and endurance, because we need to reckon with Christ's punishment of non-Christians. Listen to what Paul writes next: *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.*

Now, that pay back and relief from God may not seem to be happening now. We still suffer; the wicked still prosper. But instead: *This* pay back and relief from God *will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven.* Isn't that interesting phraseology? The Lord Jesus is already in heaven. He's already looking down on everything we do. But on the Final Day, he will replace his invisible presence with his visible presence *in blazing fire with his powerful angels.*

And then, there will be pay back and relief! *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* – no mere annihilation and then disappearance of the wicked – no, eternally they will be actively *shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.* How sad! How tragic! since Christ died for all, and he rose to give to all eternal victory and resurrection and life.

Folks, don't let the everlasting destruction of the wicked happen to you! If the Lord is going to punish and shut out from Christ's presence those who don't know God and don't obey the gospel, then we had better know God, and we had better know the gospel! It means: Your confidence in Christ is vital! There's no more important issue in your life! Trust Jesus! He lived for you! He really did die in your place! Believe it! And his resurrection means your sins are buried – dead and gone! – and your body and soul will rise, and you'll dwell with Christ forever.

Part Three: Trust God's Testimony in the Bible!

Can you use some further assurance? God's own Word says – and Paul concludes – that all of this will happen: *on the day Jesus 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.*

And isn't that what it all comes down to? Have you believed God's testimony about himself in the Bible? Have you believed it enough to admit in front of others your sins against them and against God? Have you believed it enough to confess in front of others your dependence on Jesus Christ for a right standing with the Almighty? Have you believed God's Word enough to want to learn more of it ... every week? ... every day? And have you believed it enough to trust completely that Jesus has done it all for your salvation, and you don't need to add a thing?

Conclusion: Our Self-Concept Depends on Jesus

By the grace of God, the answer to those questions is: Yes! And that brings us full circle to that idea of self-concept.

What do you think about yourself? What is your personal self-concept? Does it depend upon what others think of you? Well, on the one hand, it's good when parents value children, when friendships grow, when our hard work or our loving parenting or our faithful service as spouse garners us respect. But finally, our self-concept has got to depend on what only one other person thinks of us. And that's God!

And God thinks you're great!—because the perfectly loving things Jesus accomplished in his life count for your life. God thinks you're flawless!—because the

sins you committed ... Jesus made disappear. God thinks you're the best!—because his Best, his Son has raised you to life by his resurrection to life.

So, how could you and I not love and respect one another also?! Amen.

The Apostle Paul wrote early on: *The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.* That's our attitude today, too! Amen.