

## **Only Two Roads; Only Two Destinations**

Call to Worship: Psalm 1

Hymn #81- *A Mighty Fortress*

1st Scripture: Matthew 7:13-14

Hymn #89- *Come, Thou Almighty King*

2nd Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10

Hymn #127- *Let us Love, and Sing, and Wonder*

### **Introduction:**

Paul is giving thanks to God for the exceedingly growing faith of the Thessalonians, and for their abounding love toward one another. And all of this was taking place in the context of severe and ongoing suffering and persecution, brought about by those who were enemies of the Gospel of Christ. And last time, we saw that Paul sought to encourage the Thessalonians by reminding them of the great Paradox of Christian suffering. The unrighteous suffering of the Thessalonians was proof of the authenticity of their faith and their worthiness of the kingdom of God, and it was by this very path of suffering, that they would make their way into God's eternal kingdom of peace and rest. And furthermore, their enduring such sufferings was evidence of God's righteous judgment against their persecutors, who were evidencing the signs of God's judgment upon them, by virtue of their rejection of, and opposition to, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the end, those who were persecuted, would find eternal rest, and those who were persecuting, would find themselves given over to eternal agony and tribulation. And all of this would take place when the Lord Jesus Christ returns, shadowed by His mighty angels, inflicting fiery vengeance upon His enemies and bringing His beloved bride, the church, to glory, to be with Him forever. Sobering words, indeed!

This morning, we move into verses 9 and 10, where Paul elaborates a bit further on these two ultimate ends of the ungodly (those who know not God and who do not obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ) and the redeemed. And as we consider these things, let us be reminded that ultimately there are only two paths in life (in Christ and outside of Christ), leading to two very different (indeed opposite) destinations (eternal life and eternal death). And the questions that each one of us ought to keep in mind as we ponder these things is, "What path am I on right now? And to what eternal destination am I heading?"

## **I. The Path and Destination of the Ungodly (vs. 9)**

"These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power..." (Vs. 9).

Here, we have the destination of a certain people given to us. Before we consider it, let us be reminded of the pathway, which leads to that destination. In verse 8, we are told who the "these" are, who will be punished in this way. "...those who do not know God, and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." And so, the destination under consideration, belongs to those who "do not know God," and who "do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Therefore, the general pathway of these individuals (indeed, the far greater majority of the population of everyone who has ever existed), is the pathway of unbelief, leading to a refusal to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so, if you do not know God this morning, in truth; if you have not repented of your sins and have not sought refuge in Jesus Christ, who died on behalf of sinners; if you are not in subjection to Christ, honoring Him as your God, King, Lord and Savior, then you are presently heading to this destination. Consider then, the description of this destination:

1) "These will be punished with everlasting destruction..." Now, we must understand something very critical here, about this statement. What it is *not* saying is that these will be punished by being eternally *annihilated*. In other words, what the Scriptures mean by "destruction" is not "annihilation." Rather, it means ruin...everlasting ruin. And so, the emphasis here is on the permanence of the duration of the ruin, which will be experienced by those who do not know God and Christ. Let me give you an illustration, before elaborating further here:

Several years ago, I can recall a time that I was enjoying a wonderful vacation with my family and I was preparing to enter a swimming pool. And as I walked into that pool, I finally made it into the water, only to realize that I had forgotten about my cellphone, which was dangling in the front pocket of my swim shorts. Needless to say, the phone was soaked and ultimately ruined. It was destroyed. It was beyond repair and I needed a replacement. Now, the phone was not annihilated, was it? The parts and components were all still there. However, it

could no longer function as a phone. It could no longer function according to the purpose for which it was designed. And in that sense, it was destroyed.

In the same way, those who remain outside of Jesus Christ are doomed to eternal destruction and ruin, in that, once they cross the line of death (or of Christ's return), they will never, ever be given the opportunity of finding redemption. They will remain forever broken and beyond repair. They will be destroyed. They will never be able to live in accordance with the glorious design intended by God. They will be barred from humanity in its proper and God-glorifying sense. They will be a broken phone, and because of their moral obligation to God, they will be fit not merely for the trash bin, but for eternal judgment.

You see, God's justice demands this. People don't want to hear this, but it's true nonetheless. They will be consciously punished (condemned, judged) with everlasting destruction. Revelation 14 speaks of these condemned as those, who have "no rest, day or night" and the "smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever." You see, the ruin is a permanent condition, and that condition involves conscious retribution, likened to a continual burning in the fire; feeling the full pain without the substance of the person actually ever dissolving, forever and ever. Jesus speaks of "*their* worm never dying." In other words, their bodies and their person are never annihilated. Rather, they constantly absorb the agony of burning (fire and brimstone) with no hope of escape or annihilation.

And where does such eternal destruction come from? How is it possible that such a horror could ever take place? Who is capable of executing such justice as this?

2) "These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power..." When the Lord Jesus returns "in flaming fire taking vengeance" on them, His very holy presence, which will complete the process of sanctification for His redeemed, will also eternally destroy those who do not know God and obey His gospel. And the glory of His power will be revealed, when He executes this judgment!

You see, the same One, who is able to create this entire universe and everything in it (visible and invisible); the same One, who literally upholds everything (every atom) by the word of His power, is able to eternally sustain the wicked, such that they will continually absorb the

fierceness of His wrath in a constant state of ruin and regret, forever and ever, in accordance with the righteous standard of God's justice. He can do it, and He will glorify His power in doing it. The Lamb, who came in lowliness and humility, will return in power and glory, and He, by His very presence, will bring about this destruction.

## **II. The Path and Destination of the Redeemed (vs. 10)**

But thanks be unto God that there is another path, leading to another glorious destination. "These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, *when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed (vs. 10).*"

There is, indeed, another path! And that is the path of the saints and those who believe. A great minority are on this path for sure, but by the grace of God, there are some who find it. It is the path of life, the path of grace, the path of forgiveness for all sins and reconciliation with the God whom we all have offended, in Christ!

And notice two revealed aspects of the destination, which is set for these blessed objects of God's grace; these saints (holy ones), called out of the world by God, in Christ.

1) In that Day; at that Day of all Days, when Christ returns, Christ will be glorified in them. And how exactly will He be glorified in the redeemed? Why would He be glorified in them? Because they are the fruit of His labors! They are the product of His incarnation, His righteous life on earth, His suffering, His death, His resurrection and His continual intercessions! They are the sheep, which He has purchased, and which He has committed to the Father at His death, and they have persevered to the end. They have escaped the clutches of the world, and they have not succumbed to the destructive devices of the enemy. They have endured, by faith, entrusting themselves to the risen Christ. And, in the end, they are His trophies of grace, the fullness and completion of His success, the very banner of His victory, for all that He has achieved in His own work on earth. [Read Isaiah 53:10-12]

And so, He is glorified in them, because the greatness and the glory of His grace and power are revealed in them, and it will all be brought to completion, when upon seeing Him, they are, as He is! Redemption will have met its final goal, when the redeemed church stands, United

together; not one missing, with Christ, their beloved Bridegroom and Redeemer. What a glorious destination, to be among those, the elect, whom Christ has redeemed and loved to the end. To be one of the shining stars, which brings Him glory, before every created thing, before multitudes of angels and heavenly beings; to be a part of that package that glorifies Christ, at the end of the history of this world, is a privilege beyond all privileges!

2) In that Day; at that Day of all Days, when Christ returns, His redeemed brethren will have the privilege of looking upon Him, not as the suffering Servant of God, but as the glorious King of Kings and Lord of Lords! And they will be filled with admiration and praise! It will be a wonder of all wonders, a sight beyond all sights to behold!

How anxious we are, to behold some great sporting event and to boast of amazing plays made by our favorite teams and players. How thrilled we are to watch the next well made movie; to process a great story and to behold wonderful graphics. How honored we are to meet an individual of high position or office. How enraptured we are to behold a great wonder of the world or a place of natural beauty, to where we have not travelled before. We love to be awed and amazed and filled with wonder and excitement, don't we? To be mesmerized by athletic talent, a great musical piece, a crafty magician, a talented artist...all of these things appeal to a divinely installed "awe-chip," that exists within us.

But what of that Day, when we stand and look upon the risen, returning, victorious Christ; when the very subject and life of our salvation, whom having not yet seen we love in truth, returns and is there in the field of vision of His people. When all see Christ in that Day, there will be a particular awe and marvel and wonder that will overwhelm that "awe chip," and unlike everything else that amazes us, it will never wear off! We will never be the same after beholding that sight. It will be a BC to AD moment in history, in a positive sense for His people, and in a most frightening sense for His enemies!

Such will be the most certain experience and destination of the redeemed. And that is why Paul strives to motivate the Thessalonian church with this reminder, in the light of present sufferings and trials that were anything but joyful and pleasurable. Paul was saying, "Look to the end! Look to the prize and keep on keeping on!"

The personal element comes in, when he states, "when (Christ) comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, *because our testimony among you was believed* (vs. 10)." You believed our testimony, Oh Thessalonians, which is the very affirmation and confidence of your destination. And those who reject our testimony; those who trouble you, manifest the righteous judgment of God upon them, and they themselves will be paid with a trouble that makes your suffering look like Disneyland!

### **III. Closing Question**

All of this then, brings us to; indeed, it begs one primary question, which it would do all of us well to answer with Judgment Day honesty. What path are you on, right now? Forget about everyone else in this entire room; forget about everything else anywhere for the moment and consider this, friends. This is the most important question you can ever ask yourself. What path are you on? Are you on the path of the believer in Christ? Or are you on the path of unbelief, continuing to walk in your own ways, living life how you want to live it?

You see, there are only two paths, and there are only two destinations. The world will tell you that there are many roads to God. And you just have to be true to yourself and to whatever you believe and you'll make it to the same glory. That is an absolute pile of cow dung! Jesus Himself put it very bluntly, without any possibility of confusion, when He said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, but through Me." You see, no other path, deals justly with your sin and your offenses against God. Only Jesus, provides the way, through His shed blood for sinners, to find forgiveness, reconciliation and life.

Friends, hear me out, very clearly. There is only one way into God's favor and glory. Every other way merges together as one path, straight to hell. "There is a way, which seems right to a man, and the end thereof, is the way of destruction!" You cannot make it to heaven apart from Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone!

The atheist, who denies the existence of God is destined for hell. The Muslim, the Hindu, the Buddhist, the Taoist, and every other cult out there, are all on a Christless path that leads straight to hell. The Mormons, who advocate a different Christ and a different gospel; the Jehovah's Witnesses, who deny the very divinity of Christ, are on a path headed straight for hell.

The Roman Catholic, who trusts in anything plus Christ or in anything but Christ alone, is on a path, heading straight for hell. The professing Christian, who banks everything on a confession, and has no evidence of a living faith, confirmed in a life that is in subjection to Christ, is headed straight for hell. Only the genuine Christian, who has repented of his sins, and whose faith and trust are in Christ, and in Christ alone, is on *The* path (the *narrow* path) that leads to glory!

Which path are you on? If you're on the wrong path, plead with God to set you on the right path *now*, right here, right now, today! Don't delay another day!

Amen!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25