

“From Tribulation to Apocalypse” Pt 4

2 Thessalonians More About the End Times

2 Thessalonians 1:5-12

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Jeff: Our gracious God, we bow before You this morning thanking You for the previous evening of sleep, thanking You not only for the evenings that you provide for us, but the one day in seven that You give to each one of us that we might rest, that we might worship You and glorify Your name. And Father, as we come to You at the end of the week, or nearly so, we are thankful for the blessing of life in Christ and for the enjoyment of living that out each day. Father, thank You that You have blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places. Thank You that You have resurrected us from our spiritual death. Thank You, Lord, that You treat us so kindly, so compassionately, so often when we don't deserve it.

Lord, we ask today that You will continue to shape us after the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. But Lord, we pray that You wouldn't simply fill our minds with knowledge. We pray that You would shape our lives according to that knowledge. Give us full assent to what we read in Your word. But also give us an embrace, give us an affection for that knowledge. And Lord, let us have a passion to live it out and carry it out in our daily lives. Lord, we ask that You will do this because we know full well that You have prepared good works for us to walk in. And You've prepared those for us beforehand. And so we pray that we would walk in that way, and that our lives would grow accordingly.

Lord, forgive us where we fail, for we fail often. We pray that You will use us imperfect vessels to touch the lives of those around us. We pray that as Your kingdom has come in our lives so it would come in others', even as a result of our speaking to people about the gospel of the kingdom. Father, we pray that You'll deepen our relationships here at the Barn, but not only here. Lord, we also pray, and we pray more so, that You will strengthen our relationships in our local bodies in our local churches so that we will be an influence for Christ in those places, and that You will receive the glory as a result.

Father, we do pray for our brother Kevin. We ask that Your hand would be upon him even as he is in these difficult days. We pray and give You thanks for his wife and for the way in which she has ministered to him. We pray that she would continue to do so.

Lord, thank You for Ted. We pray that You would bless him while he is away from us. Lord, we ask that You'll continually give him good fruit from his labors. Lord, we thank You for our brother Bruce. Lord, we ask on behalf of Becky this morning that You will bless her and strengthen her, and both of them as they recover—Becky from surgery and Bruce from all of his travails.

And Lord, we ask that You'll turn our attention to Your word and that You'll bless us in it. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: All right. Let me have us turn to 2 Thessalonians. And I want us to think today about just a section of this. Let me read to you chapter 1 and verses 5-10. Let me have you turn your attention to God's word and I'll read it to you now.

“This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are also suffering, since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting

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vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might, when He comes on that day to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.”

Now let me start with a scenario that may seem in some ways a little bit crazy, a little bit fantastic. What would you do if someone walked through those doors right now, and his name was Ted, and he had an accomplice with him? *(Laughter)* And Ted said as he walked through those doors, “The Messiah is here!” And we looked at him kind of incredulously and he said, “No, not me!” *(Laughter)* And he said, “Out in the parking lot! The Messiah is here!”

How many of us would go out into the parking lot? (I don’t want to see a show of hands.) *(Laughter)* How many of us would at least be tempted to go out into the parking lot?—again, no show of hands. And how many of us would remain seated—and not because we had hot coffee that we didn’t want to grow cold, or because it is cold outside. But how many of us would simply sit here and visit with Ted?

Ted Wood: Probably quite a few.

Jeff: Quite a few; at least that’s what we hope. And here’s the question: Why would we remain seated? Now that’s a really good question, because it’s really a theological question; it’s a Biblical question. In other words, how do you make a decision like that? I mean, Jesus Himself said that there will be people who say, “He’s here, He’s there.” But He isn’t, and so don’t believe it. But how do you make that decision not to go here and there when people say, “He’s here?”

Transcriber’s Note: Don Maurer stands up to take off his coat.

Don Maurer: I’m not going out to the parking lot.

Jeff: Don’s going. *(Laughter)* Just let the record show that Don has risen from his seat. *(Laughter)* So how do you make that decision?

And you may say, “Well, that’s a little fantastic; I’m not sure that I actually think that would happen.” I want you to know that was exactly what was happening to the Thessalonians. Just look with me in this book as we just think about what’s happening here. Notice a couple of things. First of all, look at verse 1 of chapter 2. “*Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus, and our being gathered together to Him,*”—in other words, that’s what we’re studying now,—and Paul says now in chapter 2 that we’re considering that,—“*we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed by a spirit, or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.*”

That was exactly what was happening in Thessalonica. It was the idea that someone burst into the door and said through a spoken word, a prophecy, a letter or whatever, said, “The Messiah has come; the Lord has come.” And apparently there were some in Thessalonica who were shaken by that, who actually believed it. And so Paul is saying to them, “Don’t be so foolish.”

Now what I want you to catch is this. I want you to catch some other places in this letter, because I said to you what it is that should cause us to remain seated. What is it that should cause us not to go out into the parking lot? Well, look at what Paul says in some other places in this same letter.

For instance, look at what he says at the end of chapter 2 in verse 15. He says, “*So then, brothers, stand firm. Hold to the traditions that you were taught by us.*” Here are the traditions: “*Either by our spoken word or by letter.*”

Now we don’t have the traditions any longer. But we certainly have the letters. And so he’s saying, “Now listen to what I’ve written to you. Remember what I’ve taught you,” because he was actually among them for a while.”

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And then this; notice this. Look in verse 13. He says, *“As for you, brothers,”*—this is chapter 3,—*“do not grow weary in doing good. If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person.”*

So here we find in these three places that somebody had come to them in a letter—perhaps a letter or by a spoken word,—and said, “The Lord has come.”

And Paul said, “Listen. This letter I’m writing to you is authoritative. And so if you don’t listen to it, if you don’t believe it, take note of that person.”

So what is it? It’s interesting. He says at the end, “Look how I sign this letter.” It shows the genuineness of the letter itself. You know, it’s kind of the idea of “look how legible my handwriting is,” or something like that. But the idea is that here we have Paul telling us how to discern whether to go out into the parking lot. The answer to that question is that we judge everything we hear on the basis of what we read in that book, what we read in those letters. In other words, we think to ourselves, well, what does the Bible say about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ? Should I believe that He’s out in the parking lot at almost 7:00 in the morning with no one around except Ted to herald Him? Is that Him:?

And of course the answer is no, right? And it’s no because of what we read. And that’s what we’re going to read today; that’s what we’ve been reading today. So I want you to think about the description of His coming given to us in three prepositional phrases. In other words here is a description of His coming. And let’s see if it matches what Ted said earlier: that the Messiah is out in the parking lot, right? *(Laughter)*

First of all, the Lord’s present location is listed here; He is coming from heaven. And then He’s going to be accompanied by Ted—no, not Ted. *(Laughter)* He’s going to be accompanied by the angels of His power. And then He’s going to have an appearance that’s going to be rather distinctive. He’s going to appear in flaming fire.

Now when you look at those things, you think to yourself, I’m not really sure that what we’ve heard just a minute ago—He’s out in the parking lot,—squares with that description of His coming. That description of His coming looks like a very, very clear, audible, visual appearing that all people are going to hear and see. And it’s going to be fantastic, as it were.

Now what are the implications of this? Well, the implications are very striking when you think about it in light of Scripture itself. I want you to think about it in light of the Old Testament. And so when you go to Isaiah 66 verse 4, this is just one place in the Old Testament where you see this; there are other places. But in 66 verse 4, (and then we’ll jump to verse 15), it says this:

*“I also will choose harsh treatment for them,
And bring their fears upon them,
Because when I called, no one answered;
When I spoke, they did not listen.
But they did what was evil in My eyes,
And chose that in which I did not delight.”*

Then verse 15:

*“For behold, the LORD will come in fire,
And His chariots like the whirlwind,
To render His anger in fury,
And His rebuke with the flames of fire.
For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment,
And by His sword with all flesh;*

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And those slain by the LORD will be many.”

Now think about what he just said. He just said that Jesus will come in flames of fire. Now what is he saying? Paul is saying, at least the implication is that the Yahweh in Isaiah 66 is the Lord Jesus Christ in 2 Thessalonians 1. In other words, the Lord who said He would come in judgment will come in judgment. And we find that coming in judgment in the Lord’s return, in the Lord coming in judgment. He is the One who is coming in flaming fire as was described of Yahweh in the Old Testament.

So the idea that we often hear, that Jesus is now presenting Himself as a Savior—gentle, meek and mild, inviting all people to Himself that they might find salvation,—is going to turn on the day of His coming into not just the Savior of those who belong to Him, but the Judge of those who do not. And He’s going to come in flaming fire for them; that’s the idea.

And when you think about that, I don’t know about you, but when I think about that kind of description in the New Testament I think to myself of what Revelation says. Revelation describes Him as a Lamb. But remember that phrase: there are going to be those who will experience the wrath of the Lamb. It’s kind of a dichotomy that we don’t normally think about. But He is a Lamb that was slain for us, a gentle Savior who redeems us from all of our sins. But for those who are not in Him He will be wrathful.

And can you imagine that? Here you are; you have not embraced Him as Savior. And He is the Lamb who held Himself out to you, who now has only wrath for you.

You know, I don’t know about you. And this is maybe a little bit of a digression. I don’t know about you, but as I continue to grow older and survey my life I continue to think of new failures.

Ted: Yes, absolutely; it gets worse.

Jeff: Do you know what I was thinking to myself this morning on the way here? I was thinking to myself that as I grow older I know my mind will grow weaker. Now the bishop’s has not, and so we’re thankful for that. I’m hoping to be like him, but I can’t hold out that kind of hope, right? But I think to myself that if my mind grows weaker I hope that the one thing that I continually do is to remind myself that I’m able to cast myself on the Lord Jesus Christ and not fret about my past failures, and think too deeply about them to the point that in my elderly years I’m crushed under the weight of my own sin. I want to be able to cling to Christ. No matter what I remember I want to be able to hold onto Him and what He’s done for me. Yes?

Bishop Rodgers: The *theologia crucis*, which is “the way of the cross.” You can’t get too far away from that.

Jeff: Yes.

Ted: I think we all deal with that. Certainly in my case, I think that as I get older I do; these things become more vivid.

Jeff: Yes.

Ted: It may be because you aren’t as busy as you once were. You may even be distracted by the occupations of the world.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: And I think about 2 Corinthians 13:5: “*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.*” I think that those who say they have absolute faith, and they’re not worried about this because they’re not going to be on this side of judgment, I don’t know if that is a well-examined position. I mean, in the end we have two options; either He didn’t do it for us or He did.

Jeff: Yeah.

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Ted: So we kind of go with the option. Bruce Bickel used to say, “I know that I know that I know,” or “I believe it.” Do you remember that, guys? It was something like that. I mean, you can say “I know that I know that I know,” and it can be an emotional thing.

Jeff: Right.

Ted: And you can be self-deceived. And as you were talking about the judgment I was thinking about Handel’s “Messiah.” There’s that part; I love this stuff. Handel was writing in the 17th or 18th century.

Don Maurer: The 18th.

Ted: The 18th.

“And who shall stand when He appears?”

For He is like a refiner’s fire.”

Now that would be sung to audiences in England during a very corrupt time in English politics and social life. There were all kinds of awful things going on. Yet they were not afraid of that message. The best of the artistic community was throwing that in the public’s face. *“Who shall stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire.”* And so I think it’s appropriate for Christians to have a fear and trembling and to be fearful of God, because it’s just by the grace of God; I am “a spider hung by a thread.” Am I too long?

Jeff: Yes, Jonathan Edwards; thank you very much for that. *(Laughter)*

Ted: The inner circle would understand that. *(Laughter)*

Don Maurer: Also, Jeff, I was going to bring this up last week. When you were talking about our judgment being a vindication, I agree with you completely. But what scares me, particularly because I teach and other things, is where it says in James 3, *“Let not many of you become teachers,”* “because with you there will be a stricter judgment.” How do we reconcile that with vindication, if our accounting to Christ is going to be strictly vindication?

Jeff: Yeah. Well let me answer that in just a second. Let me say something about what Ted said.

Don: Yes.

Jeff: Because I agree with Ted 100%. I’m just going to give an illustration; at least this is what I’m hoping for, right? And you’ve heard this; it’s not like you haven’t heard this before. But you go out into the night sky away from the city. And you go out and you can’t see your hand in front of your face. But you can see the brilliance of the stars in the sky, to the extent that in some places in Pennsylvania you can even see the Milky Way, right? it’s just beautiful and brilliant.

But you have to get out into the utter blackness before you see the brilliance. And so it’s sort of like Isaiah 6, where in order to see the brilliance of the glory of God we need to see the blackness of our sin. And I just feel that as I get older I see the blackness of my own sin. But it makes the glory of God in Christ appear all the more radiant. My hope is just that there is never an eclipse of the night sky *(Laughter)* in terms of my own experience, because I’ve watched that in others where, for whatever reason, they’re like the people who can take the dime out of their pockets, hold it up to the sun and say, “See, I can block the sun.”

And what you’re really saying is, you’re saying that my unique little problem has clouded the sky so that I can’t see the brilliance of the glory of God. And that can happen to people.

It happened to Judas. Judas magnified his own sin to the extent that he said, “There’s no grace left for me,” and that can happen. And I’m not advocating that one can lose salvation. But I am advocating that a true believer can live in such a way so as not to live in the light of the enjoyment of the atonement of Christ for him. And that’s what I want to stay away from.

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But Don asked the question. We talked last time about vindication. So our good works precede us in the sense that they stand up as witnesses and say, “That man is a believer,” because I was one of His children in terms of works. I came from Him. “And I’m standing up as a witness that he belongs to Christ.”

Now the work was really the fruit of his regeneration, right? The work that precedes him into judgment—remember that Revelation says that their works precede them;--what it means is, the works that God prepared beforehand for us to walk in them that He enabled by our regeneration, by having made us alive,--they go into judgment before us and say, “There is one coming, and we are the vindication of that. We are the evidence that he belongs to Christ.”

Now Don said, “What about the teacher who incurs a stricter judgment?” My view is this: that the Scriptures talk about rewards. And just as in the same way they talk about rewards they talk about punishment. I think that in hell there are degrees of punishment. For instance I think that the persons who have repeatedly denied the gospel in their lives are going to incur a stricter judgment in hell than, for instance, the person who lives in Nowhere-Ville and has never heard the gospel but denies what he sees, and so denies the God of the gospel. I think they’re going to receive a less strict judgment.

And remember, that’s what Jesus said. *“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the works that were done in you were done in Sodom and Gomorrah,”* that sort of thing. So I think there’s going to be a sense in which the judgment is going to fit the crime. Why? Because God is a just God. It isn’t going to be a blanket kind of judgment. This judgment is for you because this is your sin, and this judgment is for you because this is your sin.

Well, in the same way there are going to be rewards handed out. And those rewards are going to be according to work; according to those who produce thirty, . Sixty or a hundred-fold—those who took their minas and produced—those who produced more and those who produced less, and so on. I think the idea in that sense is that as long as the teacher is not false that there’s going to be that kind of thing; that’s the idea. I should have asked Bishop first.

Bishop: I’m reading that text, and it’s precise; it’s really talking about teachers. If you think bad theology, that’s you.

Jeff: Yes.

Bishop: If you teach it to other people it’s not only you, but it’s you plus the other person.

Jeff: Yup.

Bishop: So you come under a stricter judgment as a result, and rightly so.

Jeff: Yes. In that sense you multiply children with your bad thoughts.

Bishop: That’s right.

Jeff: For sure. Yes, Rich?

Rich Clark: I would say to Ted that when I see and get a sense of my wretchedness and my sin, I become thankful to God because He’s showing me that you can’t make it any way but through the Messiah Jesus.

Bishop: Amen.

Rich: You’ve got no chance except for the Messiah Jesus. And that’s the thing I’m thankful for when I see my wretchedness. The Psalmist says in Psalm 119:120:

*“My flesh trembles for fear of You,
And I am afraid of Your judgments.”*

So you’ve got the Psalmist.

Ted: That’s true; I agree.

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Jeff: Yes. But I think for us—and this is a mundane example,—but it’s sort of like a father, right? I’ll give you an example. In this personal example I watched it in my own family. My mom and dad came to faith when I was seven, and it was a radical conversion for my dad. He came home and wow, he was different! And we were in church the next Sunday. He became a deacon and then a trustee. He would take us with him on visits to the nursing home, and so on. It was a delightful life at that point.

Our church was in a liberal denomination. But our church was conservative. But what happened was, we had a minister who was really a gospel-believing minister. And we discovered that the people in the congregation could only tolerate so much gospel to the extent—and I’ll never forget this—to the extent that the group of people in our church wrote a letter to the presbytery saying that our minister preached too much out of the Bible. *(Laughter)*

Two presbyters from the presbytery came to our church and read that letter to us. I was probably about twelve or thirteen and my brother was probably fourteen or fifteen. In my mind it was stunned silence.

Bishop: Yeah.

Jeff: And my brother who was about fifteen raised his hand, stood up and said, “What would we want him to preach out of?” I’ll never forget that. It’s like an “out of the mouths of babes” kind of thing, you know? So the presbyters were like, “yeah, that’s kind of what we think,” right?

And what ended up happening was that the minister ended up leaving, and we ended up leaving. And we went to a larger church, and my parents kind of hid out.

Ted: They hid?

Jeff: They hid; they basically laid low. They said, “We’re not going to get involved; we’re not going to get burned like that. We’ll just go,” and so on. And I don’t think they realized it. It happened slowly, but there was a deterioration that took place.

And so then what happened was, when I was 18 or almost 19 I got converted. And I remember having talks with my dad. And I remember thinking to myself that my dad is not where he should be. And I said that when I was about nineteen.

Then when I turned 22—so we’re talking years later when I turned 22,—my brother was killed. And it was like the Lord grabbed my dad by the shoulders and woke him up. And I’ll never forget this. My dad looked at me one day and he said to me, “I always loved the Lord, but now I fear Him.”

Ted: Good.

Jeff: And you know, my dad has never wavered since that moment.

Ted: Yes.

Jeff: And so I think that’s the kind of fear, at least as I think about the kind of fear the person has who is a believer—the fear that a person has for the Lord. That’s the kind of fear, right? It’s a dad who grabs you by the shoulders and wakes you up. Yes?

John Grattner: Thank you for sharing that. I think that we think that the disciples had it easier walking with Jesus.

Jeff: Yeah.

John: I think we’re very wrong about that. I think it would have been much harder than we have any idea what that was like—to walk next to and live next to God Incarnate perfection 24/7, right? *(Laughter)* And I think there’s another element to this fear. And the fear is wrapped up in Peter’s confession when Jesus looks at the disciples and says, “Are you going to leave too?”

Ted: Yeah, right.

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John: And Peter says, “Lord, where would we go? You have the words of life.” I have a greater fear of leaving my allegiance because that can’t be better. Now I believe, but help my unbelief.

Jeff: Yes.

John: Belief is allegiance. It has many facets, but I can’t prove that I believe enough. I just know I’m going to follow Him the best I can.

Ted: Right.

John: I’m grateful. There’s a fear of leaving that; what do I trust in?

Jeff: Yeah; amen to that.

Ted: Belief is allegiance; I like that a lot.

Jeff: Yeah.

John: That’s what Abraham says to the Most High God.

Ted: I haven’t come to that part of the Bible yet. *(Laughter)* Go ahead.

Ron Baling: If you want a picture that will help you with the fear that you’re talking about, I picture myself before God with the Tin Man on one side and the Scarecrow on the other side. I’m the Cowardly Lion on my knees. *(Laughter)* I think that’s how I would relate to my Father, having done wrong with my earthly father.

Jeff: Don?

Don Maurer: Jeff, in verse 9 of our text, I believe you referred to Revelation 13 where it talks about the wrath of the Lamb.

Jeff: Yes.

Don: In my translation it says, “*They shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.*” I think that in the ESV that you read that it said, “*Away from the presence of the Lord.*” I think the Puritans qualified that a little bit to say that it was away from the comfortable presence of the Lord.

Jeff: Yes. I have a note in the ESV which says, “*destruction that comes from.*” So it could be “eternal destruction away from,” or “eternal destruction that comes from.” It can be translated either way.

Don: And the word “destruction” probably needs a little more elaboration, because some people take that to mean annihilation, or eventually that the person in hell will stop suffering.

Jeff: Yes, right.

Don: And that’s not what it means.

Jeff: No, no; that’s right. Yes?

Bishop: It just seems to me that we’re not taking seriously great words that unify. First of all, “I gave you to the Son.” So there’s the early covenant in which the Son receives us from before the foundation of the world. So if God has given us to the Son, He has done so.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bishop: Secondly, there’s the absoluteness of the cross. All of our sins have been dealt with; they’ve been paid for.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bishop: And thirdly, there’s the presence of the Holy Spirit as the signal of your hope.

Jeff: Yes.

Bishop: There’s a strong note of hope in the rest of the Scripture that it seems to me we must not ignore.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely; 100%. Absolutely.

Bishop: It really isn’t up to us primarily.

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Jeff: Yeah, that’s right. And praise be to God for that.

Bishop: (*Unclear*)

Jeff: Faith is a fruit of regeneration—what God does in us; right.

Bishop: *“He who began a good work in you will complete it till the day of Christ Jesus.”*

Jeff: Yes; that’s right. So the Lord coming in blazing fire according to Paul is the Lord Jesus. He will deal out punishment to those who do not believe the gospel. And that’s what he says.

Bishop: It’s a terrible word.

Jeff: Yes.

Bishop: Because there are people right now who are staring death right in the eye.

Jeff: Absolutely. And so when you think about this, when you think about why it is that He’s coming to judge, He’s very clear about it. He is coming in judgment to them because they do not obey the gospel as it was preached by the apostle Paul.

Bishop: Right.

Jeff: I mean, it’s that clear. And so I guess I would say this. For us as we’ve talked about clinging to Christ in the end, when we think about God coming in Christ inflaming fire upon those who do not obey the gospel of God, doesn’t that light a fire under you a bit, one of sharing the gospel with others? I mean, we talked a little bit last time about not wanting to lose relationships, and so we kind of keep our tongues. But here’s the real question. The real question is not do we want to lose a relationship, but do we want to see that person lost eternally?

Bishop: Yeah.

Jeff: Just because we didn’t want to lose the relationship? I want you to think about that for a minute; it’s a little selfish. In other words, I want these persons as I have them for the time that I have them because I’m using them to satisfy some need in me, rather than taking the risk and sharing the gospel with them to see if God might turn them so that they would be saved—not saved so that they could delight in me in some way, but saved eternally.

And boy, you have to think that way, right? I mean, you have to basically step out and say, “Lord, I really want this relationship with this person. But I know I’ve got to share the gospel with him because I care more about his eternal salvation than my friendship with him.” It has to be that way. And I don’t think that we think enough about that.

You know, I honestly think that we are people who want peace a little too much.

Ted: But everybody does.

Jeff: Yes.

Ted: That’s a human characteristic. I mean, you often hear folks say that you ought to share the gospel because if you really cared about that person and he doesn’t know Christ, he’ll end up in hell. Well, we just don’t do it. I mean, what you’re saying makes sense; I mean, that’s logical. But we just don’t do it. The statistics show it in the United States. obviously in other parts of the world they take it a little more seriously.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bishop: In Nigeria they do it.

Ted: In Nigeria and parts of Africa and other places.

Bishop: Yeah.

Ted: But certainly not in this country. I mean, the statistics show that the percentage of Christians as the percentage of the population has not increased in the last fifty years.

Jeff: Yeah. Let’s take a second to think about that and ask the question. Let’s just talk about why it is that we don’t do that.

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Gary Craig: I just want to say, that’s the terrifying part of the Second Coming. It’s seeing what happens to other people sinking down. Why doesn’t it sink us down?

Ted: Why is that not motivating us? You’re saying it should motivate us, but in fact it doesn’t.

Jeff: Yeah.

David Miller: I’ve been in the preaching ministry for twenty years, sharing the gospel. I’ve discovered a conversation turner. And that is that after I’ve covered all the niceties and the relationships and so forth, I say, “How is your walk with Christ?” And from that point it absolutely turns the conversation toward the gospel.

Jeff: Yeah.

David: And that’s something that a lot of people don’t have, a way to turn the conversation from the weather to Christ.

Jeff: Yeah; that’s right.

Ted: It’s true. But why don’t we do this? I mean, you can go to seminars to learn how to do this kind of thing.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: But we just don’t seem to want to do it.

Jeff: Yeah. I’ll tell you why, and I think it’s going to build into the last chapter. This is my own view, and I’d be happy for pushback. But you know, when you get to that last chapter in chapter 3 verse 6 he starts talking. And he actually starts talking about the church.

Transcriber’s Note: 2 Thessalonians 3:6, NKJV. *“But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.”*

Jeff: But he says, “I want to deal with you guys over an issue. I want to deal with you over idleness. And you guys are idle.” And remember, he deals with that.

I want you to think about that. Where does that idleness come from in Thessalonica? I don’t really know. But I know where that idleness comes from today.

Dorothy Sayers said about eighty years ago that sloth in our culture has basically taken the shape of tolerance. And remember that tolerance breeds people who don’t believe anything, don’t really love anything, don’t really hate anything, aren’t willing to die for anything, because there’s really nothing worth dying for. That’s tolerance, and it’s crept into our thinking.

Regardless of whether or not we want to think of it that way, we are affected by sort of the constant emphasis on tolerance in our culture. Intolerance has now become the great sin for which people banish you from social circles and family circles, and so on. But intolerance doesn’t mean being mean. Intolerance just means that I refuse to buy that lie. I’m going to be as nice as possible, but I’m not going to countenance that lie; it’s a lie.

I mean, think about it. We are inundated with this kind of thing. Look, I don’t know what your political views are and I really don’t care. But when I see Kamala Harris being asked by Chuck Todd, “Is the border secure?”

And she says, “We have a secure border.” (*Laughter*) And he says to her, “We have had two million people cross that border. Is the border secure?” And she says, “We have a secure border.”

Now I say to myself, “Either she’s stupid, or she’s trying to get us to believe a lie.” And we are afraid to say that’s a lie because that would be intolerant. So instead we go along with what is said, sort of knowing in our heart of hearts that it really wasn’t true. But we are so practiced in the art of tolerance today that we just go along with it.

And it’s not just that situation, but that’s any number of situations that we find ourselves in and that we have found ourselves in for years and years and years, because tolerance has been

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preached heavily since the ‘90s. And so I think we’re just a tolerant group, which means we’re slothful in terms of our willingness to stick our necks out, sacrifice relationships and speak the word of the gospel. I don’t know; maybe you don’t think that way. I’m happy to have some pushback on that. But that’s at least the opinion I have.

John: I think that tolerance is that she doesn’t want people to believe a lie; she wants to redefine the truth.

Jeff: Oh yes. This is great; yes.

John: This doesn’t mean what you think it means.

Jeff: Right; yes.

John: And the church has been taught this tolerance in how we hear it defined, because “the gates of hell won’t prevail against it,” which is a total misunderstanding and a redefinition of what that actually meant. Gates are a defensive structure. They won’t prevail against our offensive onslaught to go and subdue, in bringing the Kingdom by preaching the gospel. It’s not that we don’t want peace; we actually don’t want peace enough, because we’re not willing to go on the offensive to get the real peace, which is peace with God through Christ amongst our brothers sharing the same Spirit. They won’t get that except for the preaching of the gospel. It’s promised to us that the gates will not withstand the gospel, not go into your place over there and don’t tell anyone what we’re all in this secret society together. And we’re not going to come and get you.

Jeff: Yeah.

John: That says it all. And that got redefined somewhere along the way, where we think that we’ve done it by going and hiding. (*Unclear*) No, our allegiance is to the cross. And we’re going to go and take that cross out there.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely. That’s great; that’s a great reminder. Yes?

Don Bishop: I just want to say that this church (Christ Church) is really standing up for that. The sermon on Sunday was about Abraham. And the three men came and said they were going to destroy Lot. He prayed about what was going on in Sodom; it was very plain—homosexuality.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: A terrible sin. More churches need to preach the truth as it applies to society today.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely. Amen; amen to that.

Bishop: It also says, “gossipers.”

Jeff: Yeah; there are a lot of things.

Bishop: There are many gossipers. You’re right there along with homosexuals in the list.

Jeff: Yeah. Actually that list is a long one; it’s the one that comes at the end. And you know, here’s the one that’s the most troubling. At the end of the list he says, “And by the way, it’s all of those who give their agreement to these people who do these things in the list.” He gets you coming and going. You may say, “Well, I’m not really in that group. But I’m for that group.” And Paul says, “Yeah? Well, you’re in that group.” (*Laughter*)

Well, what’s the purpose? The purpose is judgment and reward; that’s the purpose of His coming. I want to talk to you about Paul’s prayer before we wind up today. There are three petitions in the prayer that he prays. He basically brings this to a close basically with a petition. And the question that we need to ask ourselves is, how do we pray?

And we’ve already talked a little bit about this before, because I said to you that it sounds as if we need to be worthy in order to come into the Kingdom, to walk worthy. And remember that I took you to this later in the chapter. And I said no; it’s God who makes us worthy. So we already dealt with this before in some ways.

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But he says, “*that our God may make you worthy of His calling.*” And what he’s saying is, this is a prayer with a present expectation. In other words, may God make you worthy not later on, right before you enter the pearly gates. But the idea is, may God change your life presently, so as to conform it with the gospel walk.

So we’ve been talking about faith; we’ve been talking about it being the fruit of regeneration; we’ve been talking about God doing it all. But there’s a real transformation that needs to take place as well. The transformation doesn’t earn us anything before God. But the transformation comes as a result of being in a relationship with God.

And this is the whole point of his prayer. His prayer is that we may be changed now by God. Changed to do what? That we may fulfill every resolve for good, and fulfilling every desire to be and to do what is good.

Now I want you to think about that. This is nothing more than simply the echo of what we find in Ephesians 2:10, right?

Transcriber’s Note: Ephesians 2:10, ESV. “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*”

Jeff: It is God who prepares good works, that we should walk in them. And here he is asking that God would fulfill every resolve for good. Where does the resolve for good come from? It comes from God. It doesn’t come from us; we were evil, right? “*And every inclination of*” our “*hearts was only evil all the time,*” says Genesis 6. But now He has purposed in us good thoughts and works. And so now Paul’s prayer is, may God fulfill every good purpose and work—every good purpose, every good desire—every good work in you. That’s the idea. In other words, may your life be a transformed life; that’s the idea.

And so I’m equating this—may He fulfill every work of faith—with Ephesians 2:10. And then Philippians 2:13; this goes back again to what we’ve already said. “*For it is God who works in you, both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*”

So we are not saying that this transformation is apart from God or earns something before God. This transformation is a result, a direct result, of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus.

Now that’s really important; I want to continue to stress that, because if we believe there are two ways we can go. When you go in the direction that says that all I have to do is believe in Jesus, and you forget everything else, then you forget everything else that He says: that God works in us to will and to do His good pleasure.

Or you can go in the other direction and focus on the transformation and forget the belief and say, “I’m going to earn something before God on the basis of what I do.” Both of those are wrongheaded.

What is right is the idea of the *duplex gratia Dei*, that union with Christ and the twofold grace of God that we receive in Christ—both forensic benefits—justification, adoption, those kinds of things,—and renovative or transformative benefits—that is, sanctification, newness of life, walking in good deeds. All of that is gifted in Christ.

Bishop: And perseverance.

Jeff: Yes, and perseverance to maintain that. And so what is God doing? He’s creating evidence in you that will precede you into the judgment and vindicate you—not merit anything for you, but vindicate you on that great day. Okay?

But what will happen before the revelation of Christ? Well, we’ll have to find that out. (*Laughter*) That’s all I have for you today. We have a couple minutes if you have questions. Anything else before we wind up? Yes, Don?

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Don Maurer: I think that one reason we fail to evangelize to our friends or coworkers or whatever is that it is hard work.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: I’ve talked to my neighbor from down the street who is in her 90s and an atheist. And her heart is as hard as a rock. And it’s very exhausting at the end of that time because she says off-the-wall things, and really she doesn’t know what she’s talking about.

Jeff: Yes.

Don: We were talking about my mom. And she said, “I wish she were still here.” And I said, “She’s in a better place now.”

And she said, “She’s in the ground.” And I said, “She’s with Jesus.”

“How do you know Jesus? Nobody ever met Jesus.”

I said, “People who wrote the Bible meant Him. The apostles met Him, and He rose from the dead.” And it just goes on and on and on. It’s hard work and can be very exhausting spiritual warfare.

Jeff: Yeah.

Paul Sedlock: I’d like to add to Don’s point. I’ve been sitting here pondering about our complacency. What was the word that you used. Not complacency, but slothful.

Jeff: Oh, yes.

Paul: I was kind of thinking of complacency. I read somewhere that the Roosevelts were filled with complacency, something like that. And I know in my own personal life that it’s easy to do nothing. If you don’t do anything or you do something it’s still a choice, right? And if I’m scared to do something then the choice is to do nothing, right? So in preaching the gospel, where I think I should be doing that, I’m almost wondering if it’s me not having enough confidence in myself to know what I’m talking about to actually preach to somebody, or purport to kind of do that. So that kind of falls back on myself. And I’m wondering if maybe that’s also something. We’re a little shaky ourselves. So I’m not going to tell somebody else.

Now if it’s a subject that I’m an expert on and I know well, get out of the way. I’ll tell you all day long about it, right? I don’t know if that makes sense.

Jeff: No, it does make sense. I think that you can choose to go on one of two routes, right? You can choose to go on the intellectual route and say, “I’m going to try and reason this person into the Kingdom. I’m going to meet every creational argument they have”; that sort of thing. And no one is going to be able to do that effectively, because no one is saved on the basis of the intellectual arguments.

And let’s just face it. When you fight with the world, the world is like the atheistic woman who either says non-intelligible dumb stuff, or pseudo-intelligible dumb stuff.

Bishop: Yes.

Jeff: You know, they quote the mind that sounds really erudite, and so on. And so the idea is that you’ve got to know who you’re dealing with. But I’ll tell you what. You can come at it from an experiential argument. In other words, you’ve been persuaded by the great Persuader. You know how life is different. You know what the forgiveness of sins feels like. You know what the anticipation of heaven feels like. You know the experience of having been in a relationship with Jesus Christ. And you can come at it from that perspective.

You know, you can ask questions—not like “Well, what do you do with creation?”, or that sort of thing. But you can ask the question, “What do you do with guilt in your life? I can tell you how I deal with guilt in my life.” And there’s real guilt out there in the world, plenty to go around. So you can come at it from a relational perspective. And you don’t have to put yourself

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in a position where you fret about not knowing the answer. If you don't know the answer to something, say “I don't know the answer to that; I'm not really sure about that.”

But here's the other thing. If you think that's a pile of bull dung that they just gave you, you can say, “You know, I think that's a pile of bull you just fed me.” *(Laughter)* “I really don't believe it. I'll check it out. I don't know if I can answer right now. But I'll probably find out that it's a pile of bull.”

Just be real with people. And you know, we're not saving anyone. Christ is saving them by using us as instruments, imperfect as we are.

Don: She also says to me that you just believe this because it makes you feel good. Well obviously it makes me feel good; of course it does. But hell doesn't make me feel good.

Jeff: And you should say to her that walking in humiliation doesn't make me feel good.

Don: That's right.

Brave Man: Jeff, what do you think is kind of the problem—why we are all so timid or why we hold back? What do you think?

Jeff: You know, I think there are a few reasons. I think it's kind of multi-layered. I don't think it's an easy one-to-one. But I do think in terms of a general kind of thing that we've bought into the culture. Tolerance has seeped into our way of thinking. But I also think that we get ourselves set up to thinking like you expressed it. I'm not an expert on this; I'm not sure I can engage that. And our world has made it their business to make Christians stupid, right? And so we feel that we can't really face off with them. I think that's crept into it; we feel inadequate.

You know, you talk about the relationship. I think that there's even a danger in that. People make us feel inadequate in terms of this. Oh yeah; you have a relationship with Someone you can't see; that sort of thing. But again you have to trust the fact that you have a relationship, and you're just speaking into their lives.

I think there are a bunch of reasons. It could be even personal kinds of things, personal inadequacies. But it's funny. My zeal for Jesus since my early days in the faith has been sort of taken and transformed into a curmudgeon-like faith; you know what I mean? Before it was “Hey, you've got to believe in Jesus!” Now it's “Look, the Psalms say that you're stupid.” *(Laughter)* The only way not to be stupid is to believe in Jesus. *(Laughter)* You know, that sort of thing. Way back there.

Brave Man: I was going to say how terrible it is, and I think it's a lot of fear. But when we witness like you're describing, it's not a witnessing but it's more about God.

Jeff: Yes. And that's great; that's a great way to look at it. I'm just testifying to the fact that He's working in me. Praise be to God, right? That kind of thing.

Ted: It's not so much about tolerance; I think tolerance is a secondary issue.

Jeff: Yeah?

Ted: I think it's that we have too much to lose. The parts of the world that see huge conversions are the peoples that have very little to lose.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: We have way too much to lose. We're living in a very prosperous part of the most prosperous time in world history. We all have more. We can do more; we have the money to do it. We tolerate and we protect our assets.

Jeff: Yes.

Ted: And therefore we say that the problem is tolerance. Well, tolerance is a secondary thing. It's more that we have too much to lose.

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Jeff: . And you are right. But loss is a reality. And so I agree with you 100%. But loss is real. And this is why, for instance, I’m candid in what I say; I’m candid in what I write on the Internet and things like that, because my session is not going to fire me. In fact, if I am not saying things boldly, they might fire me.

The way I look at it is that the people who can speak more freely need to speak more freely, because loss is a reality. And you might be able to sue to get your job back because you were wrongfully fired, or something like that. But you still lose your job for a while. And so there’s a reality to it. So I agree with you 100%. All right, you get the last word.

Don Bishop: The way I was brought up was that my parents were Christians, but Arminians. And the other people, they were just stupid for not believing the Lord. We were smart enough to believe in the Lord. And so the church is kind of like the culture. We’re not reaching out, and we’re a lot like the 1900s.

Jeff: Right.

Don: And we’ve gotten into the habit of the church not being bold.

Jeff: Yes, that’s right. Well let me pray, and then we’ll close out.

Father, we thank You. We thank You for the day; we thank You for life and breath. We thank You for the benefits of knowing Christ. We pray now that You’ll bless us as we go out into the world. And Lord, give us the ability to be bold, to praise You, to give glory to You by testifying to what You’ve done in our lives. And Father, we pray that You’ll make us adequate. We know that even the apostle Paul said, “*Who is sufficient for these things?*” We feel that. And so we pray, Lord, that You would indeed give us the ability, the prompting to speak. And Lord, we just pray that You’ll bless us with Your Spirit as we do. Lord, give us the ability to see some fruit in the words we speak. Lord, help us to see a little bit of the harvest to encourage our hearts. And we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. (*Applause*)