

We put a lot of trust into the court system: judges, juries, prosecutors and defenders. We as a public trust that when someone is accused of something the process will eventually sort it out and get it right. Juries will hear the evidence and make the right decision. Judges will be fair to the accused according to the laws. Prosecutor and defender will try to the best of their ability to get it right. This is what we trust in.

I hope that unless you're working in one of these positions you never have to get involved with the court system. Because there's still a great deal of injustice in the world. Just this week, a man was released in California after being jailed for 34 years for a crime he apparently didn't commit. Greedy companies and their owners seem to get rich by taking advantage of workers. Some people game the system and get benefits they don't deserve. We look past a certain amount of unfairness and injustice. Either that or spend your entire life trying to fight it and get nowhere.

In the second lesson, a second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul writes about their situation. They've not only been facing the normal injustice, but they've been receiving persecution too. False teachers have tried to turn them against the truth of God's Word. Physically they were attacked. These were Christians, where's the fairness? When would things get better? Would they ever? We might have the same questions about ourselves and we learn answers when Paul writes. Things will be...

**Set right at the Last Judgment  
God's decisions are just  
It has eternal implications**

I know what they mean. But I can't help but cringe a little when I hear it anyway. "That was God's plan." So we're all just walking the map God has for our lives, just like that commercial with the green investment line? Stay on God's line and you'll be okay. But how often isn't that said after something painful? How could loss of job be part of God's plan? How could losing my grandfather so early in life be part of God's plan? How come suffering is part of God's plan? Unfortunately when something painful happens one of the last things I or anyone wants to hear is that it was part of God's plan.

Unbelievers were physically attacking the Thessalonian Christians because they didn't want them or anyone else preaching about Jesus. It was ugly and it would only get worse. Some very new Christians were under attack and it seemed the unbelievers would win. Listen to what Paul writes. **"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."** Sounds a lot like "It's all part of God's plan" talk. So their suffering was evidence their suffering was right? As the Christians in Thessalonica were being persecuted Paul was still boasting about them to others. He would boast that they were actually increasing in their love for each other and their faith in Christ...all while suffering persecution. In a word, they were enduring. The fact they were enduring persecution and still growing in faith and love was evidence it was God's plan. Their persecution was just the right thing because it served a bigger purpose. It drew them closer to God. It strengthened God's grip on them and assured them of his love.

What hurts most is thinking that maybe God wants me to go through the suffering I'm facing. God's plan is that I feel pain? Ouch! That seems God is against us. He must have turned his back on us. He must not love us anymore. We thought once we became a Christian everything would go perfectly. We wanted the glory of heaven already here on earth. We chase the glory. Suffering ends up pulling us apart. We start becoming more independent as we chase glory. Congregations become fractured chasing glory. Suffering, whether personal or as a congregation, makes us hurt and if God is the one behind that then we get mad at God.

The suffering of the Thessalonians and the suffering you're facing today is actually a sign of God's love. He hasn't stopped loving you. Don't think for a minute that God has in anyway turned his back on you. You want proof? You make it through the suffering, in the past and today. God never leaves you to your own resources. You're in the right place at the right time with the right things happening to you because God's decisions are always right. **"You will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God."** You're worthy of knowing Christ Jesus by faith. God made that decision long ago. He designed the entire world so that at this moment you would know his love for you in Christ and believe it. God's got a plan and it includes you believing in his love for you.

That plan also includes suffering as preparation. It prepares us for the glory to come when Jesus at the Last Judgment. We can look forward to a time when the suffering will end, rescue from this body of death. We suffer today and tomorrow with confidence in God's decision to have us suffer. He stands behind us using suffering to bring us closer to him, not letting it go too far, and ultimately sharpening our trust in his love for us. Suffering also draws us closer to each other. We learn to rely on the strength and encouragement that comes from fellow Christians. These are God's pipelines of grace to us. Rely on each other for love.

We'd love it if our decisions only mattered in that moment. A decision to drive in the snow wouldn't lead to the body shop later to have car repairs. Or a decision to drink too much didn't lead to waking up the next morning not feeling so well. Decisions made now have implications later. God's decisions are always fair, even when they don't seem fair. They're right even if we think they're not. And they have implications beyond today or tomorrow. When God sets things right it has eternal implications.

My sinful nature craves getting even. Someone says something bad, I want the last word. They cut me off I cut them off. They cheat to get ahead I cheat to get ahead. It only seems fair. Paul told the Thessalonians it wouldn't be that way for them. **"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."** Eventually things would be even, but not until the Last Judgment. On that day God would give out two judgments. First the believers would be judged worthy of heaven. Second the unbelievers would be judged for persecuting and not believing in Jesus. **"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."** Judgment is coming. Things will be set right for eternity. But not right now.

We wait while unbelievers seem to have free rein and all the advantages. Being a believer is hard and we make a lot of sacrifices. So maybe we're tempted to take a day off? Take some moments where we're not so hard on ourselves. There's plenty of time. I'll be ready when Jesus returns. What's the harm in having a little fun while I wait? Or we point the fingers at people we can't wait until they get what's coming to them. We imagine our worst enemy in hell or we imagine the person who's hurting us in some way as facing the judgment of God. It almost feels good. We get comfortable with the idea of some people going to hell because they deserve it.

Remember the promises made to you in Christ. **"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."** You're one of those holy people who have heard and believed. You'll spend eternity with Christ because of what Christ did. Because of his life and death you have the crown of life. It's yours. You're the body and he's the head. Jesus can never be complete until he's glorified in you. We have the outstanding promises of a Savior who is returning to give us relief. Not just freedom from our problems here, but an eternity of joy, peace, and face to face contact with God that will never end.

The drama of Judgment Day that will unfold is all ready. The curtain is simply waiting to be drawn open. We're in the days leading up to that day. As Christians we live not taking vengeance but leaving God to set things right. We live witnessing to those around us of the coming judgment and inviting them to avoid hell by believing in Jesus. We sound the alarm that the times are short and people need to hear now the gospel of Jesus. Tomorrow is too late. We bear witness to what Christ has done and what God will do for those connected to him by faith.

In today's court system only a few cases go to full trial. Most people don't want to face the judge and jury because they might lose. No one will avoid the Last Judgment. No deals and no amount of good works will be enough. The only thing that will make the Last Judgment bearable is knowing Christ by faith. God's grace has called you into that relationship with him. The Last Judgment will finally set things right for us when all God's decisions will be shown to be just and our eternity in heaven will become reality forever.