

2 Thessalonians 1:8,9

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[0 : 0 0] I'd like us to look for a while this evening at verses 8 and 9 of 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 which says in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power and this seems at first glance to be simply a reference to the last judgment and to the souls that will end up in hell and in one sense yes it is referring to such souls but it's not a sort of general reference to the damned and the lost in general every text is a context and if we're to get the sense of these verses 8 and 9 and the sense of how and why the Lord has this punishment lined up for these particular individuals we really have to take the verses 4 to 10 to get the sense of it so we read in verse 4 so that we ourselves, this is Paul writing to the Thessalonians glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions their long suffering, their patience and their faith the substance of things hold from, the evidence of things not seen holding fast in all their persecutions and tribulations that ye endure which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which ye also suffer seeing it as a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you and to you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ who shall be punished for everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power when he shall come to be glorified in his saints and to be admired in all them that believe because our testimony among you was believed in that day so the sense here is not simply of people in general going to hell who are sinners the sense in this chapter is of people being eventually lost and in a lost eternity and being sent to a lost eternity as part of God's justice now we recoil to an extent from the idea of anybody having to go to hell and hell is not a popular subject either in preaching or in our understanding of God but we do acknowledge that it is a reality because the Bible reveals it too but the context here is of those who have specifically persecuted the church of Jesus Christ those who have made it their business to oppose, to persecute, to attack the church of Jesus Christ and in that context even if we leave our own sufferings in the sense of the church of Jesus Christ aside we know ourselves that there is something inherently unsatisfying unfulfilling that just doesn't fit and doesn't make sense were this to be the only world that there is if there is nothing beyond this world then there is an inherent sense of that can't be right because what about all the people that spend their lives getting rich and fat on the persecution of others what about all those who have exploited the wage slave and the poor and the downtrodden what about all those who have simply vented their sadistic desires to be cruel to others or whatever and there is no comeback they depart this world rich and fat and well off and nobody touches them and there is no comeuppance there is no justice in that

and we think well you know that's unsatisfactory in the moral sense in the sense of the soul in the sense of any kind of balance of righteousness and even if we're to say ah yeah but it's okay because if they're bad then you know their kids will really be in for it and the next generation all the wrath will come down on them we think well that's not exactly fair either is it it's not really fair if you or I end up being punished for what our grandparents did instead of what we ourselves have done and of course God's word is quite explicit that everyone will answer for their own sin and not simply for the sins of others each one has to take responsibility for themselves so even if people were to say oh this world is all there is that's it there's nothing else there is this sense of not only the problem of evil and how do you address that sense that there has to be a balancing act somewhere there has to be a righteousness that corrects the imbalance because it is so inherently unsatisfying and unanswered and just doesn't fit but also you're left with not only the problem of evil but the problem of good there is no afterlife there is nothing else why would anybody bother to be good or kind or nice to somebody else other than for self-interest are we really such completely self-centered beings

God's word is quite clear no we're not meant to be that is not how we are designed but there are those who make it their business when good is revealed to attack it we all know that that is the case we know that our brothers and sisters throughout the world are suffering persecution even as we speak whether it is their homes being destroyed or burned down or their churches being bulldozed or individuals being sent on by a mob or women or children attacked or girls kidnapped or men being murdered or whatever it may be it is going on all the time and there's this sense in which we think well does God not see does God not allow this how does this keep on being allowed to happen this is not a new problem in Psalm 37 the psalmist writes you know at verse 35 I have seen the wicked in great power and spreading himself like a green bay tree but he goes on to say yet he passed away and lo he was not yea I sought him but he could not be found

Jeremiah likewise you know pleads with the Lord Jeremiah faithful servant of the Lord says in chapter 12 righteous art thou O Lord when I plead with thee yet let me talk with thee in thy judgments wherefore did the way of the wicked prosper wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously thou hast planted them yea they have taken root they grow yea they bring forth fruit thou art need in their mouth and far from their reins and what is the Lord's answer when Jeremiah pours out this complaint he doesn't say you know you're right Jeremiah I'll have to do something about this he says look if you're finding this too much you know if thou hast run with the footmen and they have weary thee then how canst thou contend with horses and if in the land of peace when thou trustest they weary thee how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan in other words there's worse to come well does God somehow take pleasure in the sufferings of his people is this what we're to understand when we read here you know about your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure verse 4 and then verse 5 which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God well it's God saying yeah there's my people's suffering sometimes I'm right yeah

I'm too pleased about that no that is not the Lord's sense at all it is rather it is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which ye also suffer now the kingdom of God would just be thronged with people if believing in Christ and trusting in him meant that you got rich you got powerful you got everything you wanted you got all the blessings of this world all this in heaven too but who will love a God for whom faith in him simply means that his people end up suffering that's got to be real love when you're prepared to go through fire and suffering and persecution and difficulty because of the love of the Lord you know this is partly what Paul means when he writes to the Colossians in chapter 1 verse 24 who now rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake which is the church how can the sufferings of Christ be behind is that not enough was the cross insufficient no it doesn't mean that at all the context is quite clear afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake it doesn't mean his physical body on the tree on the cross it means rather his body which is the church and there is that which the church has yet to suffer there is that which the Lord's people must yet endure not because God delights in their suffering although he delights in their faithfulness in the midst of sufferings but rather it is again as we find the apostles themselves at the end of Acts chapter 5 we read that after they had been again admonished by the Jewish council of Sanhedrin and then they had beaten them and whipped them and they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name and daily in the temple and in every house they ceased not to teach and preach

[10:08] Jesus Christ in other words it is like the battle scars of the Lord's people testify to their faithfulness God does not delight in their suffering but he delights in their faithfulness in the midst of suffering which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which ye also suffer seeing it as a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you now this is a big test of faith here because this is what indicates and as he goes on to say at the end of the chapter as well you have the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you and you and him according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ you need grace you need faith that we want to say well actually you know we have to leave this with the Lord

I'm not going to take this vengeance myself I'm not going to pay back myself because I believe that God will do it it's like if somebody commits a crime against you and you report it to the police and you think well it's been two days now and nothing's happened the police have done nothing so I'm just going to go out to their place and I'm going to jolly well trash it just like they trashed mine if they stall from me I'm going to steal from them if they burn my car I'm going to set their car on fire if they beat me up I'm going to go round with a baseball bat and I'm going to settle things up myself now what would happen if you did that well I can tell you right off being prosecuted for having taken the law into your own hands because if in terms of the civil and criminal law of the earthly kingdom in which we were we would be in the wrong in the eyes of the law for taking the law into our own hands and not allowing the forces of law and order to implement the law and do it themselves and take due process against the criminal how much more will the

Lord consider his dignity his rights his glory to have been violated if his children trust him so little as to say well God is taking too long come on it's been ages now I'm going to pay back I'm going to take my revenge and I'm going to settle the score myself Romans 12 tells us at verse 17 recompense to no man evil for evil provide things honest in the sight of all men if it be possible as much as life and you live peaceably with all men and the context there suggests even those who persecute you dearly beloved avenge not yourselves but rather give place unto wrath keep backing away from it give it space so it can sort of work itself out you know it's like if you've got a firework in your hand and it's going off then you don't sort of cover it up with your hand to try and smother it so you'll just get burned but rather you stick it in the ground or something you give it lots of space so even if it's spinning away or it's sending sparks everywhere it's got space it can be earth it can do its damage without burning you give place unto wrath back off from it give it space let it cool down for it is written not never worry about vengeance just turn the yellow cheek and forgive but rather vengeance is mine

I will repay saith the Lord and this is why it says therefore if an enemy be hunger feed him if he thirst give him drink for in so doing shall he call the fire in his head be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good does it actually say vengeance is mine I will repay saith the Lord well Deuteronomy chapter 32 we read in verse 34 and 35 this is what the Lord says what we see what he had written here where he says at verse 35 to me belongeth vengeance and recompense their foot shall slide in due time for the day of their calamity is at hand and the things that shall come upon them make haste and the previous verse says is not this laid up in store with me and sealed up among my treasure the Lord has this already recorded already sealed away ready to be open ready to be unleashed the idea that God does not see that God will not act this is the heathen idea and it's one reason the Lord leaves the wicked to get on with their wickedness is so that they fill up the measure of their unrighteousness

Psalms 94 same problem we read we sang from Psalm 94 earlier verse 7 verses O Lord God to whom vengeance belongeth O God to whom vengeance belongeth show thyself lift up thyself thou judge of the earth render a reward to the proud Lord how long shall the wicked triumph how long shall they utter and speak hard things how long shall they boast the workers of iniquity boast themselves they break in pieces thy people O Lord and afflict thy heritage they slay the widow and the stranger and murder the fatherless yet they say the Lord shall not see neither shall the God of Jacob regard it God sees all right God knows all right and every such activity of the wicked is sealed away in his treasure box like it says in Deuteronomy 32 when that's brought out then it will be part of that which causes the haters and persecutors of the

[16:01] Lord and his people to be convicted by their own knowledge their own conscience the evidence of their own lives you know it's the difference between if sometimes you see on TV you know whether security forces or whatever they go into people's house and they put cameras in the light bulbs and they put listening devices in the wall and various other artifacts and so on and then they watch on their screens and they listen to see what people will see there is all the difference in the world from how people will behave if they know that their room is bugged and they know that people are listening than if they think they're completely alone if people think that they are not being observed that's when you see their true behavior we are what we are truly when we think we will get away with it when we think we are not being seen not being watched we know that we know that we are in the days when the

General Assembly used to be televised and the cameras would sometimes pan around and people would be seen in all sorts of embarrassing poses some people you're completely nodding off for somebody to speak and other people gouging up their nostrils and other things and so on because they didn't realize the camera was on that when people are being seen and know they are being seen they act completely differently when they think they are completely unobserved they will behave in a different manner altogether and the wicked think God does not see but rather it is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which ye also suffer seeing it as a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you notice recompense the sense of pain it is like they are running up a debt and eventually will be presented with the bill now of course there is nothing that anybody has done which cannot be washed away by the blood of

Christ you could be a mass murderer and rapist and terrorist and all the rest of it combined into one but if you truly repent it and trust it in Christ the blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin there is nothing that Christ cannot wash away and take upon himself on the cross but the truth of the matter is that so often those who perpetrate the greatest evil want nothing to do with the Lord it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you and to you who are troubled rest with us not right this minute when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels that's when suddenly those who are exalted were gathered up to meet with him in the air when he comes with the trump of God and the voice of the archangel and his people are gathered his elect from the four winds and then he manifests and states who are his and who are not and some of us may get a surprise at that time in flaming fire taking vengeance of them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our

Lord Jesus Christ and we think well that's a bit rough isn't it taking vengeance on those that don't know about God if they don't know about God how can they be blamed well of course ignorance will not be a means of salvation when the last day comes those who have perished without any knowledge of Christ will still be lost will still be in hell ignorance is not an excuse but it does provide something of the urgency for spreading the gospel around the world but I would suggest to you that that is not the only sense in which know not God is meant here that may be one aspect of it but I think the more accurate rendering of it in this context of know not God means refuse to recognize to acknowledge to believe in God because look at the context here obey not the gospel good news of our Lord Jesus Christ when Christ comes he brings good news forgiveness of sin hope new life in him and this is what they will not obey this is what is bad news to them this sense of knowing not

God is in the sense of refusing to acknowledge or recognize God it's like I've cited often before when Moses is before Pharaoh and Pharaoh says in Exodus 5 verse 2 who is the Lord that I should obey his voice to let Israel go I know not the Lord neither will I let Israel go now it's not the case he's never heard of the God Jehovah of the Hebrews because Moses is there telling him he's saying the Lord God of the Hebrews says let my people go he says I never heard of he means I know not God I do not recognize this God as being a genuine God I fear I don't I don't I don't recognize this God I know not the Lord neither will I let Israel go likewise in the same sense in Psalm 101 verse 4 a stubborn heart depart quite from me shall a person given to wickedness I will not know at all none of us can be in the situation of saying oh well

[21 : 34] I have a single person in my acquaintance who is unpleasant or unbelieving or whatever we all know people who are unbelievers and who may be quite unpleasant characters to boot or a combination of both but it doesn't mean it in that sense it means when it says I will not know at all it means I won't own I won't not know at all in the same sense this was made reference to in prayer Matthew chapter 7 verse 23 where the Lord says of those who say oh Lord Lord have we not cast out demons in your name when your ain't done great things depart from me ye that work iniquity for I never knew you now if this is Christ we're talking about he can't say oh I didn't she didn't cover I was ignorant of these people no he wasn't he knew these people from before they were conceived in the womb he knew every breath they took every day of their lives when he says

I never knew you he means I never owned you recognized you as belonging to me you were not mine and I do not acknowledge you as belonging to me that's what Pharaoh means I at all and when Christ says depart from me I never knew you it's not talking about ignorance or absence of acquaintance with it is meaning an unwillingness to recognize an unwillingness to acknowledge in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ sometimes I think in all honesty that it might be more appropriate almost although of course this is not what the Bible teaches and it's not in any sense what I'm saying is true but it might be more appropriate almost if the Lord did practice universalism and take everyone to glory because those who hate him would be like worms squirming on a hook because to be in the presence of such bright light and perfect goodness they would absolutely hate to be in such a presence of such purity goodness for what they desire in sin and darkness and death and if you think

I'm joking and if you think that doesn't ring true in the past week the past ten days anyway a journalist in a respectable broad sheet in the Herald referred to a church choir coming from America singing in one of the shopping centres in Scotland a church choir likened them to the Nazis and to ISIS now the atrocities of the Nazis are well documented it's a matter of history their gas chambers and their treatment of individuals of races and so on we know how many people perished and all that they were guilty of the atrocities of ISIS are likewise well documented they like to film themselves decapitating prisoners they decapitate children they abduct women they sell women in the slave market literally they do all these atrocities and this church choir was likened to ISIS and to the Nazis for what reason why would a journalist from a respectable

Scottish broad sheet liken these people to such evil organisations what has this church choir done well this church choir comes from a church in the United States whose big crime is that they are pro-marriage in other words they think marriage is between a man and a woman and pro-life and that's it they think that children should be preserved in the sanctity of life in the womb from their conception to natural death and they think that marriage is between a man and a woman that's it and for these penis crimes which until comparatively recently were just bog standard common sense in anybody's understanding in this country they are now being likened by this journalist to the Nazis and their crimes and to ISIS and their crimes now there is no other way to describe such completely skewed bigotry other than that the hatred for the gospel and for the light and for the Lord's people must be so intense as to be pathological it has turned darkness into light black into white and vice versa such that our church choir is reckoned on the same level as these terrorist organisations and totalitarian dictatorships and all the evil that they did and she was being quite serious she wasn't joking it wasn't tongue in cheek she was absolutely serious that is the level of prejudice against the light of the gospel the good news of

Jesus Christ is regarded as hideous evil hateful by such people and that's in Scotland in the 21st century this is one reason why I say that all will serve these people right they'll be brought into God's presence and just left there to writhe and be angry and to hate the life and to see the goodness and purity of God they would just hate it they would be in hell itself it is almost a mercy on God's part that he does for them exactly what they desire in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ who shall be punished with everlasting destruction death is destroying of life and it's everlasting ongoing from the presence of the Lord and we talked the other day that part of the definition of hell it is that the comfortable presence of the Lord is not there it's not that God can't go there it's that he has withdrawn his comfortable presence from hell so the souls in hell in a lost eternity are deprived of God's comfortable presence they're in outer darkness they're in everlasting destruction death just goes on and on and on without dying the agony continues the absence of God just continues from the glory of his power from the presence of the

[28 : 10] Lord and this then shows them what the absence of God in their lives and in the world and in eternity is like because the complacency with which they are saying what they say and doing what they are doing is in a world where God is still present where God is still at work and they hate the light and they hate the gospel and they hate the Lord's people and the Lord gives them exactly what they choose he gives them a world without God without light without comfort without pleasantness he gives them a world and eternity of pure evil pure death pure separation from the comfortable presence of God it's almost mercy on God's part and yet it is at the same time perfect justice this is what the Lord does and he remembers his people why doesn't he do it sooner why doesn't he just intervene now you know we haven't saw the back you didn't all see but some of us you would have seen the lightning storms last night and the sheer power with one bolt of lightning why doesn't the Lord just zap some of these evil people why doesn't he just zap the persecutors and strike them with a bolt of lightning well one reason is he is allowing them to fill up the measure of their iniquity so when judgment falls it is seen to be judged remember what the

Lord says to Abram in Genesis 15 he says that of his people they shall go down into a foreign land they will serve will I judge the people who will make them slaves in a foreign land in the fourth generation they shall come hither again now the fourth generation doesn't mean ourselves and then our parents and our grandparents and our great grandparents like could be maybe 80 years it means 100 years to a generation the reason we know that is because Exodus 12 tells us of verse 40 the sojourning of the children of Israel who dwelt in Egypt was 430 years and it came to pass at the end of 430 years the same same day it came to pass all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt so when the Lord says in the fourth generation they shall come out hither why does it take so long why isn't the Lord just given the promised land now and the answer is for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full they have not yet accumulated the depth and level and consistency of wickedness for which in the fullness of time they will be expelled from the land for which in the fullness of time most of their nations will be wiped out by the

Israelites in their blitz creek in the fullness of time these nations will be completely removed and by then their iniquity will have merited it but for now it does not and so for now they are left in peace in the land by the God of perfect justice Abraham despite the a saint of the Lord does not inherit the land Isaac Jacob do not inherit the land yet they have to wait 430 years four generations until finally the time is fulfilled and the Lord brings his people out of Egypt and then they have 40 years in the wilderness and then he brings them to the promised land because the iniquity of the Ammonites is not yet full why does the Lord wait so long one reason is because he must have not only perfect mercy but perfect justice not only for his people but the Lord requires to be seen to be absolutely just even to the wicked and even to the lost that they must be able at the last day to be convicted by their own conscience and the evidence of their own lives and their own hatred against the

Lord's people and that when they saw the light they preferred darkness and when they heard the good news the gospel they preferred the bad news and the evil they hated the Lord's people with a pathological hatred equating them with every kind of density of evil because they so hated the Lord and his good news and the Lord allows that the Lord allows that iniquity to fill up its measure and in the meantime he allows his people to be battle scarred and to go through the middle of suffering and of persecution mindful of all the failure seeing and reckoning and remembering every sigh every teardrop every cup every stripe every drop of blood he knows and he remembers it all it is all sealed up in the treasure chest of his justice so that when his vengeance is unleashed on behalf of his children who have not we pray struck back themselves who have not taken the Lord into their own hands who have not presumed to themselves the office which is

God's alone but have trusted that he will do what is right that the judge of all the earth will do righteously that the sovereign Lord of his people has their interest in mind they give this final act of submission to him they believe that he sees it all that he will undertake for it all not my will but thine be done and if that means our sufferings our deaths at his hand then we are content that it should be so we are the clay he is the potter seeing it as a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you and to you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels then he will acknowledge who is his and who is not who has suffered for him and who has inflicted the suffering upon his people he sees and knows and remembers and vengeance is mine says the

[34 : 43] Lord it is not ours but it is his as is perfect justice not only for the suffering not only for the sins but perfect justice must also be seen to be done even for the benefit of the wicked and the haters of the Lord the judge of all the earth shall do justly the Lord in his mercy will not forget and the goodness of God will long after his people and will remember them let us pray