

**2 Thessalonians 1:5-10.**

***<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you <sup>7</sup> and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. <sup>8</sup> He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power <sup>10</sup> 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.***

***"It's gonna happen".... For God is Just***  
***Believers might have to suffer***  
***Believers might have to wait***  
***But relief and glory will come***

They had to wait and wait, but oh what joy this long time beleaguered group now enjoys! Over 100 years (108 years to be exact) had gone by since the last time the Cubs had won baseball's greatest prize. Frustrations and missed opportunities, their own miserable stumbling and things outside of their control: it all left this franchise with the label as 'loveable losers'. The label "loveable" may have only made it a bit more bearable they were still known as losers nonetheless. The weight of all these years of losing, of falling short, had become the heavy load that the players, the coaches, the staff, the fans of this proud franchise had to bear. But then, it happened. On Wednesday night, November 2, 2016, with fans holding signs saying things like, "It's gonna happen", it did happen. The Cubs won it all. In the seventh game of the World Series, after this final game went into an extra inning that only took place after a rain delay, finally, after all this waiting the game ended in an historic victory. And as soon as the ball reached the first baseman's glove and the final out was recorded, the team and their fan base were filled with a euphoric feeling of relief that immediately erupted into sublime celebration.

Suddenly the weight of the waiting, the angst, the disappointment, the suffering (if you can really, call it that, we are just talking about baseball after all) it was all lifted. And the people rejoiced in this tremendous scene, in this unforgettable eruption of jubilation. Players leapt and wept on the field, and all the fans rejoiced together in this almost unprecedented scene of relief and joy. Some fans who made the trip to Cleveland were jumping up and down in the stands, there were crowds upon crowds of people celebrating back in the streets of Chicago, others shared pictures of their in-home celebrations which featured joyful snapshots of their elderly grandparents who had waited their whole life to see their team win it all. All of them seemed overjoyed with a deep sense of relief and joy. What a scene! What a celebration! The wait was finally over! And so, it only made sense that when the team came back to their home town, a party like none other would be enjoyed by so many. Officials estimate that 5 million people showed up to the Chicago Cubs victory parade and rally on Friday, making it the 7<sup>th</sup> largest gathering in human history. It was a party that was a long time in coming. To be a part of something like this,

an historic event that was centuries in the making, that must have been, just, incredible!

Our lesson for today points us toward a celebration that is also centuries in the making, but it is one that will bring with it the ultimate euphoria of *eternal* relief. It speaks triumphantly of the Last Day when Christ will appear in all his glory, and we will share in this glory with him. Those who believe in Jesus will be delivered from suffering and frustrations to eternal glory, and this good news is then made personal, as Paul declares to those believe in Jesus, “this includes you”. Paul writes of the sure and certain promise of Christ’s return on the Last Day... ***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.*** Through these words Paul encourages believers that “It’s gonna happen.” As Christians, we might have to suffer, we might have to wait, but relief and glory will come, for God is just.

It has been far longer than a mere hundred years for God’s people as we wait for Christ’s promised return on Judgment Day. During these centuries of waiting in a sinful world God’s people are constantly subject to frustration, disappointment, heartbreak and suffering. Often such suffering and disappointment is due to our own miserable stumbling, but there are indeed also other factors and rivals pressing on us from the outside world. The label loveable loser is easily cast upon the Christian by the unbelieving world, and then sometimes those who label Christians as losers aren’t even so kind to include the term loveable. Throughout history a good number of societies, cultures, and individuals have been unapologetically unkind towards Christians. Some have been blatantly abusive in attacking and deliberately aggressive in their persecution of Christ’s Church. And while we have been extremely blessed to live and dwell in this nation where we can worship and live out our faith in relative peace, there will always be – to one extent or another - a cultural or a personal pushback against our Lord Jesus Christ and his followers. Neighbors and family members, co-workers and a certain general portion of the population will oppose and be pitted against us. Some might publicly question or privately criticize, quietly ridicule or blatantly attack us. Some might shamelessly poke fun of or relentlessly threaten us, coldly ignore or harshly exclude us. Some might openly insult our beliefs right to our face or a few might even threaten us with harm. As long as we live in a sinful world, to some extent believers will always have to suffer for the name of Jesus.

That was certainly the case in Thessalonica. They were not only hard pressed, rejected, and looked down upon as losers by their pagan Greek neighbors, but the Jewish population in this city were particularly fierce in their persecution. Jealous for attention, notoriety and influence, Jews from Thessalonica incited a riot to drive Paul and his ministry team from the city. And then when Paul and his companions moved on to Berea the leaders of the Jews in Thessalonica sent agitators to disrupt their ministry and work in Berea and beyond. They were cruel towards Paul and therefore Paul was right to be concerned about the believers who remained in Thessalonica and how they would be pressured and opposed because of their faith. And yet despite all of this, Paul gave thanks for the reports that he received that the faithful and resilient group of Christians in Thessalonica. Instead of being weakened or crushed by the weight of everything pressing down around them they were strengthened and they were a source of strength for others. In his letter, Paul takes time to give thanks that despite the tremendous pressures of life their faith was growing more and more and their love and support of each other was increasing. He also gave thanks to God that this congregation was an uplifting model of perseverance and faith, a great

source of encouragement for other Christians near and far.

After Paul speaks of his gratitude for such faithful believers, he points to such faith building and strengthening of Christ's Church as evidence that God knows what he is doing. This was a case study in how things will be and could be for the Christian and for the Christian congregation that stands up under the pressures of the surrounding world. With God's help, God will hold his people fast so that they would grow in their faith and one day that would be delivered into the victory and relief that is waiting for those who believe in Jesus. ***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.*** Yes, they were suffering, it was not pleasant at the time, but in the end, it would totally be worth it. The Christians in Thessalonica would be strengthened, sustained, counted worthy of the kingdom of God, and one day through faith in Christ each believer would be delivered to the glory of heaven that only Christ Jesus can provide. God even promised that those that opposed them for their faith, those that treated them cruelly and held them down, these enemies of Christ and his Church would be silenced, thrown down, and punished. ***God is just. He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled...*** They would have to wait, but relief was coming, for God is just.

In our modern culture Christians are put down and at times regarded as backwards and slow in getting with the times. To some extent we have felt that personally and even publicly. It is not a pleasant thing to be viewed and treated as such, and we easily grow weary and uncomfortable with bearing such a load. There are times that we take it willingly as those who are proud to suffer for the sake of Christ and his name. However, more frequently than we would like to admit we grumble and we complain under the weight of the slightest pressures at home, at work, or in any other social setting. Like some sort of self-entitled child, you and I cry out, "unfair". We envision God in his glory and we want our share of that glory now. In our sinful and self-absorbed way of seeing things, our Father, seemingly stands by and watches and allows "all the other kids" to have it so much better than us. How can this be? Not fair! We cry, we stomp, we mope, we pout. We might even become bitter or angry toward our Heavenly Father or act out in our frustration. And yet in his great love for us God our Father is patient with us. In Christ, he forgives us and then through his word takes us aside and explains in the clearest of terms how things will be made right, his children will get their turn. Just be patient and you will see.

Through a simple reminder from the pen of Paul and from the Spirit of God, the LORD calms us down as he repositions our sights on this eternal truth. ***6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well.*** God is fair. God is just. God's children, Christ's Church, will get our turn on top. A day will come when we will no longer suffer under the label of loser, but we will live and dwell for all time as champions. And it won't be a mere passing moment of prosperity, but eternal joy, it will be the utter and everlasting euphoria of paradise that his people will enjoy!

We might have to wait, we might have to suffer, but through God's gift of faith we know "it's gonna happen" as so each day we can live in the assurance and the confidence of this victory that is ours in Christ. We can live our lives with eyes fixed on the day that we will be included in the remarkable and historic moment that Paul describes with these words from his second letter to the Thessalonians. ***This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the***

*gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power <sup>10</sup> 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.*

The words that Paul writes here certainly have a serious and even ominous tone. It is not exactly the light-hearted picture of a baseball team winning the big game, or a child at a birthday party being assured that she will get her turn, but then again there is much more at stake. The day described by Paul is the day in which God makes things right for his people, once and for all. There will be severe punishment and unparalleled disappointment and pain for those on the other side. Those who attacked and persecuted and caused Christ's Church suffering and pain, those who ignored and neglected God's Word, even those who did not know God or believed in the gospel of Christ Jesus, they will all be ***shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.*** But there is a positive message for us who believe that we should not overlook, and that is my point in using the illustration and the tone that I have struck in this sermon. There is this great contrast that God sets before us in the day of Judgment that makes the full colors of his redeeming work so vibrant. On the Day of Judgment that will be horrible punishment for those who do not believe in Jesus, but for those who by the Spirit's power were brought to faith and held onto the promises of God they will be given eternal victory. Those who were made worthy of God's Kingdom by faith in the perfect life and innocent sufferings and death of Christ Jesus our LORD, they will be given there share in the eternal glory of heaven. What incredible power and grace are given to us with the words, ***This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.***

Harry Caray, the Cubs late great announcer once delivered an end of the season game wrap-up that included these now celebrated words, "Sure as God made green apples someday the Cubs will be in the World Series and maybe sooner than we think." It took a few more decades than what Harry Caray probably anticipated, but this year, it did indeed happen. The Cubs not only made it to the World Series, but they won it all. And now no one can take that victory away from them. As sure as God made green apples it would happen, and sure enough, it did. "It's gonna happen", finally turned into "it happened". Victory is theirs. Relief and joy has come.

You might have to wait for what seems like a long time, you might suffer for the name of Christ as you wait, but one day you will be given relief. One day you will be given glory and the full realization of the victory that Christ has won for you, for even more certain is God's promise to those who believe in Jesus. As sure as God made green apples, victory is yours in Christ. On that final day, on that day of Judgment, you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God. Because of Christ's righteous, because of his undeserved love for you, because of his willingness to suffer in our place, and because of his gracious gift of faith, we know that it's gonna happen. On that glorious day, we will be part of the most remarkable and historic gathering, standing among the great multitudes of believers we will marvel at the wonders of God for all eternity. This is God's promise, and it includes you who believe. It's gonna happen, and God will be with us to sustain and keep us until that day is finally realized. Believers might have to suffer, we might have to wait, but relief and glory will come just as God has promised; for God is just. Amen.