

The Most Terrifying Surprise

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10
Preached on: Monday, May 30, 2016

Once again, it is my great joy to minister the word of God to you. I would ask you to take your Bibles this morning and turn to 2 Thessalonians 1. We will be examining verses 6 through 10 as we continue to make our way verse by verse through this amazing epistle, having gone through the first epistle and now into the second one. This morning I have entitled my discourse to you "The Most Terrifying Surprise" and I think that will become abundantly clear as we go on.

As we prepare our minds for what I believe the Spirit of God has for us this morning, may I remind you that history has many different themes and it typically depends upon the perspective of the historian who will often focus on the unique background of a specific culture; typically the historical narrative will include some convenient revisions necessary to somehow advance a particular culture's agenda. We see that very often here in the United States and you look, for example, even with the Muslim history and you will see that they deny the Holocaust and so forth. But what is missing in virtually all history books is the big picture that God has revealed in his word, one that begins with, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and ends with what the Lord Jesus says at the end of the book of Revelation, "Yes, I am coming quickly," to which the Apostle John replied, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus, the grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen."

It's important for us to understand the big picture that is presented in the word of God. You might think of it this way: there are two dominant themes in Scripture, God must redeem the people and he must also restore the kingdom. And as we look at the concept of God redeeming the people, we see the Lord Jesus Christ pictured as the sacrificial Lamb, as the Savior, as the suffering servant; and with respect to the idea of restoring the kingdom, we see him presented in a very different way: he is presented as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, as the Messiah, as the sovereign King and so forth. And as we look at Scripture, we see early on a picture of a promised Lamb in Genesis after the original sin when God killed an innocent animal, a substitute that had to die to cover sin; a picture of a coming Redeemer that would one day make atonement for the sins of the people. We see this Lamb pictured in Israel's deliverance from Egypt. We see it in the sacrificial system in the Old Testament. We see it pictured all through Bible prophecy. We see it pictured as well in virtually every story in the Old Testament. Then the Lord Jesus arrives on the scene, God incarnate, the Son of God, in the Gospels; a Lamb that opened not his mouth; the one who died to save sinners. Then all through the New Testament, we learn about his plan of redemption. We see all of these signs that point to his return as King of kings and we are taught how to live for his glory. As we look at the Gospels in the New Testament, we see Christ in his humiliation but then at the end of the New Testament in

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the book of Revelation, we see him pictured in his exaltation, the Lion of Judah, the King of Israel who has promised to return in vengeance to judge those who have rejected him, to establish his glorious kingdom upon this earth for a thousand years, to display the splendor of who he really is.

Folks, that's the big picture but since that day when Jesus physically ascended back into heaven, since that day when the two angels assured those who marveled at him saying that he would come again just in the same way as they watched him go into heaven, since that day, men have continued to mock all of the promises that God has made in his word, especially the promises with respect to future judgment. For example, in 2 Peter 3 beginning in verse 3, Peter addresses this. He says, "in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.'" In other words, everyone knows that the universe operates apart from some God. There is no evidence in history that God intervenes. Everything operates based on fixed laws, the principles of evolution. So there is no judgment that God is going to somehow come along and judge the human race.

Just think what people would say, the average person on the street, if you were to go up to them and ask them, "Do you believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that he is going to return to this earth as King of kings, Lord of lords in unimaginable glory to pour out his holy wrath upon all who do not know God and who refuse to obey his Gospel?" People would look at you like you had lost your mind. They would laugh at you. They would scoff at you. They would think you were delusional. And most people would use the same argument, "Come on, really. Show me where God in the past has intervened in human history in some form of catastrophic judgment." Well, this is exactly what Peter went on to address in verse 5 of 2 Peter 3. He said, "For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according

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to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction."

Friends, what we have before us here in 2 Thessalonians 2 is an example of Paul speaking some of those things that are hard to understand which the untaught and the unstable distort and, my, are those distortions clever. Perhaps this is you. Perhaps you do not believe that the Lord Jesus is going to come again in glory and pour out his vengeance upon the earth. Perhaps you do not believe that what God says in his word is exactly what he means, that everything from Genesis to Revelation is actually his word, his promise. But if we know Christ, we know that these things are true. If we don't really know Christ, then we will continue to ridicule these things as so many have down through the millennia and if this is you, dear friend, you will one day experience the most terrifying surprise in all of history.

This is what Paul is addressing here even in his salutation. Remember, Paul has already praised this church for their perseverance and faith in the midst of all of their persecutions, in the midst of all of their afflictions which they endured. You will recall in verse 5, "This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering." You will recall that God uses persecution to drive us to him, to conform us more into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then he goes on to explain God's retribution on those who oppress him by oppressing his people and this is the heart of what we will examine for a few minutes here this morning.

Notice verse 6,

6 For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed - for our testimony to you was believed.

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Dear friends, these are amazing words. They have staggering implications, not only with respect to what's going to happen in the future but also with respect to how we should think and how we should live. In an effort to somehow help you understand these amazing truths, I've divided this section of Scripture into three very simple categories. This morning we are going to look at the retribution, the revelation and the reward of Christ. The retribution, the revelation and the reward of Christ.

Notice first the retribution of Christ, that is, the retributive justice of God against those who have persecuted these Thessalonian believers and, by extension, who have persecuted Christians down through the years. Notice verse 6, "For after all it is only just," the term means "fitting; proper." "It is only just for God to repay," and that term "repay" means "to give back." It could be translated "recompense." "It is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you." Drop down to verse 8, "dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." Dear friends, this is a testimony of the just character of God. God is never unjust in his punishment as some would like to have us believe for as John tells us in Revelation 19:11, he is, "Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war."

You see, the reason why so many people believe that God's judgment is unfair, if it even exists at all, is because they have a very low view of God's holiness and a very high view of their own righteousness. When we make God look small, we make ourselves look pretty big but in truth we are more sinful than we can ever imagine and his perfect and righteous character is more holy than we can imagine. You see, most people fail to understand that sin is that innate inability within us to conform to the moral character and desires of God and therefore God is just in his judgment towards us and he is merciful and gracious beyond our ability to even fathom when he offers us a way through the Gospel to be reconciled to him through faith in Christ.

So God can never be accused of being unfair. Job tells us in Job 37:23 that, "The Almighty will do no violence to justice and abundant righteousness." And Jeremiah tells us in Jeremiah 32:19 he is, "great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, giving to everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds;" I might also add that it is common in Scripture to see this theme of retribution. In fact, God uses it as a deterrent to bring sinners into himself. I can still remember very vividly when I was a young boy when I understood that I was a sinner in need of mercy. I understood that if I did not repent of my sins and cry out for that undeserved mercy that I would perish in my sin. I feared God's judgment. I feared

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hell. And as a child, there was no arguing, there was no debate. I had no defense. I knew I was guilty as charged and frankly that is the attitude of every genuine believer; every person who has truly been born again. And all through Scripture we read about the just judgment of God on sinners. Let me give you yet another example. In Isaiah 66, beginning in verse 4, we read this, "So I will choose their punishments And will bring on them what they dread. Because I called, but no one answered; I spoke, but they did not listen. And they did evil in My sight And chose that in which I did not delight. Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at His word: 'Your brothers who hate you, who exclude you for My name's sake, Have said, "Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy." But they will be put to shame. A voice of uproar from the city, a voice from the temple, The voice of the LORD who is rendering recompense to His enemies.'"

Now, we must be careful that we do not see ourselves as the judge and executioner of God's holy vengeance. We cannot rip the sword of divine vengeance out of his hand and put it in our own. Now, throughout human history we know that men have hated God, they hate all who belong to him, they serve their father, the devil, Jesus said. They serve Satan who is a murderer, a deceiver, accuser, a blasphemer, a liar, and in varying ways, we all experience the world's hatred of us. Jesus promised that the world is going to hate us because we are united to him and because they have hated him but, dear friends, the next time your heart boils over with that feeling of revenge, remember this: it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you. And that should bring comfort to us. I know of different ones and friends and family members that I have had down through the years who have suffered greatly for Christ. I know of some that have died as martyrs. I have friends around the world, I'm sure you do as well, and there is a part of them, there is a part of me that finds great comfort knowing that some day justice is going to be served. But, folks, this should also drive us to pity because unless these people repent, they will one day feel the full weight of God's wrath upon them. In Romans 12:19, Paul says, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."

I must also add that there is nothing wrong with crying out to God to take vengeance on our enemies. This is at the heart of the imprecatory Psalms, those Psalms where the Psalmist cries out with curses and prayers that God will somehow punish his enemies. I think of Psalm 35, the Psalmist says, "Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me." In Psalm 139:21, "Do I not hate those who hate You, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with the utmost hatred; They have become my enemies." And dear friends, as we hate the ways of the wicked, we must also hate the wicked ways in our own heart and certainly this was what was going on with some of these believers in Thessalonica, some of their friends and family members had been persecuted to the point of death and it was going to grow worse and worse. We know that

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the tribulation martyrs will one day plead for God to avenge them and bring glory to himself when they cry out according to Revelation 6:10, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" And to be sure, Jesus will do just that one day. He even described his time of coming judgment at his second coming as days of vengeance in Luke 21.

Now, this vengeance is not mere retaliation nor is it some irrational outburst of anger on his part but rather it is the just execution of God's perfect judgment. Notice here in verse 8, he is going to deal out retribution "to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." Now, first of all, what does it mean here those who do not know God? Well, we know that there are many people today who claim that they know God, they kind of know about him or think they have some understanding of who God is. Many people believe in God but biblically they do not know him to worship him, to love him, to live for his glory. They have no experience of his presence deep within their soul. So those who do not know God refers to those who are willfully ignorant of who he really is. They are willfully ignorant that he is not only their Creator but he is also a holy God whom they have offended by violating his law, that he is the one true and only God, the God revealed in the Bible, that has revealed himself to both nations and individuals through reason and through conscience, through his word and through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ; that he is the one who has provided a way where he could extend his mercy and his love to sinners through faith in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But I want you to notice also that these are those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus, an interesting concept. You see, they reject the promise and the offer of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and we must understand that such a rejection is a criminal offense in the eyes of God. You see, this is an act of high treason against the Most High. When a person rejects the Gospel and scoffs at that, it's an insult to a holy God, and in light of this, we must also understand that believing the Gospel or as some people would say, trusting in Christ as your Savior or receiving Christ, that must never be a decision that a man makes merely for the purpose of personal benefit. We must understand that such a decision is an act of obedience to a holy God and to refuse his offer is to reject his will, a supreme act of treachery against our sovereign King and it is worthy therefore of his retribution.

Notice in verse 9, "These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction." Eternal, never ending destruction. The idea is that of eternal ruin, not of annihilation as some teach. Let me argue that point biblically for a moment because some people get confused about this. In Jesus' parable, for example, of the rich man and the poor man, remember the poor man, Lazarus? The rich man was not annihilated, instead he was in great torment in

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Hades which is the realm of the wicked dead who await their final judgment. We could go to Revelation 14:11 where there is a description of hell as a place where "the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night." Isaiah 66:24, the context there is God speaks through his prophet and he describes the horrifying and eternal fate of all who rebel against him and he calls that place a place where "their worm will not die And their fire will not be quenched." You see, folks, Scripture simply does not teach that those who do not know God and who reject his Gospel just disappear, are annihilated when they die, rather they enter into an eternal hell.

May I give you yet another example? In Revelation 20:10 we read about the beast and the false prophet who are cast into "the lake of fire" and it is fascinating that they are still there a thousand years later when Satan is then thrown in with them. The text reads, "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." So this will be eternal, permanent. A permanent destination not only for the antichrist and for the false prophet but for all of the unredeemed, all who do not know God, all who reject the Gospel, for Satan and all of his minions.

So back to verse 9. He says, "the penalty of eternal destruction." Again, it's not merely a ceasing to exist but it is a ruination that is everlasting. It's a ceasing to enjoy anything enjoyable in a place called hell. It's a place of hopelessness and misery and I find myself shuddering whenever I have to preach on it but it is the word of God and we must not somehow circumvent these great truths because to do so mitigates the glory of the Gospel.

This term also, this penalty of eternal destruction, comes from the world of jurisprudence and carries the idea of paying the consequences for a wrong that was committed. Jude 7 speaks of the guilty who will suffer "the punishment of eternal fire." And Jesus in Matthew 25:41 is described here, he says, "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.'" And, folks, I find it absolutely amazing when I consider the truth that the Gospel offers what Paul says later on here in chapter 2, verse 16, the promise of "eternal comfort and good hope through grace." Isn't that wonderful? The Gospel offers eternal comfort and good hope through grace but the rejection of God's initiative in the Gospel is going to result in eternal punishment in a place that Jesus called a place of unquenchable fire, a fiery furnace; what Jude 13 speaks of as a place of blackest darkness that has been reserved forever. And in Revelation 21:8, a fiery lake of burning sulphur.

But I want you to notice also this penalty of eternal destruction will also include being cast, he says, "away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." The

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original language here carries the idea of being shut out. Can you imagine being shut out from the presence of our glorious God? In fact, what Paul says here is almost an exact citation of Isaiah 2 in verse 10 and several other passages. Let me read this to you. He says there, "Enter the rock and hide in the dust From the terror of the LORD and from the splendor of His majesty. The proud look of man will be abased And the loftiness of man will be humbled, And the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. For the LORD of hosts will have a day of reckoning Against everyone who is proud and lofty And against everyone who is lifted up, That he may be abased. Men will go into caves of the rocks and into holes of the ground Before the terror of the LORD and the splendor of His majesty, When He arises to make the earth tremble." And in verse 21 we read that the wicked will "go into the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs Before the terror of the LORD and the splendor of His majesty, When He arises to make the earth tremble."

So, dear friends, here in verse 9, Paul is speaking of how the Lord will come one day in power to execute judgment and, again, this must have been of great comfort to these believers who were suffering in such serious ways. But I am captivated by his reference to the majesty of his power which frankly speaks of really the severity and even the glory of his judgment. You know, we're all fascinated with power. I remember when I was a little boy, I was fascinated with my horses because they were so powerful but it wasn't long until I was even more fascinated with big engines and muscle cars, okay? And then I found myself really fascinated the first time I got to ride with somebody on a bulldozer. Boy, to see that earth being moved and trees being pushed over. Absolutely astounding but, folks, that's nothing compared to the power of a tornado or a hurricane or a flood. Imagine the power of a tsunami and then move from there to an atomic bomb and even beyond that to a nuclear warhead. But dear friends, all of these things pale into utter insignificance compared to the majesty and the power of our glorious Lord when he returns, the one who was once a babe in the manger that will return as the King of kings and Lord of lords, and this will be a source of unspeakable terror to those who do not know God and who have not obeyed the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. But, you know, this will be a time of inexpressible unfathomable joy for those of us who know him by his grace and who have obeyed the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ by his grace. But as I think about it, to be banished forever from the intimate fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ, from the glory of our God, to be cast out into outer darkness where we are told there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, to be incarcerated in the solitary confinement of eternal darkness and torment? Oh, dear friends, this is too terrifying to even comprehend.

Now, when will this dreadful separation occur? Well, this moves us to our second point: the revelation of Christ. Notice at the end of verse 7, it will occur "when the Lord Jesus

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will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire." Drop down to verse 10, "when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed - for our testimony to you was believed." In verse 7, focus for a moment with me on that word "revealed." In the original language, it is apokalypsis; it's a compound word, apo means to take away and kalypsis is basically a cover. So literally this is speaking of an uncovering; a laying bear. For example, the book of Revelation, the title of it in the original language is The Apokalypsis Yesu Christo. It's the unveiling. It is the revealing of Jesus Christ. So Revelation is the disclosure of that which has been concealed. It is a manifestation from God that lays bear that which was once hidden. But I want you to notice that the Lord Jesus will be revealed, he says, from heaven. Where is the Lord Jesus right now? He is in heaven. He is seated at the right hand of the Father. We are told that he is interceding right now on our behalf, on behalf of all whom the Father has given him.

And Paul says that he "will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire." As I was meditating upon this passage, I thought, "My, there are so many passages to take my dear people to help them understand this. Where do you even begin?" One of the greatest problems in expository preaching is deciding what you're going to leave out so I'm going to leave out a whole lot but I'm going to give you a little bit. I want you to think with me about what John saw in his inspired vision in Revelation 19. We're going to take just a little, a brief excursion into the book of Revelation to get a better picture of what Paul is describing here.

You will remember in Revelation 19:11, John says, "And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war." Now, bear in mind that prior to this John witnessed mighty angels of judgment, he says, "coming down out of heaven." We see that in chapter 10, chapter 14, chapter 18. But now he comes to chapter 19 and what's fascinating is moments before he sees heaven opened, moments before he beholds the Lord of glory on the white horse, he says in verse 1, "I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.'" You can tell that the tympanies are rolling here and the curtains are coming back. Something is about to happen and in verse 11 we see the reality of those words.

He says, "And I saw heaven opened." Beloved, heaven was opened not so that John could see in but so that the Lord Jesus would come out. That's what's going on here. And he says, "and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war." Now what a stark contrast this is from our Lord's first coming when the King of kings rode into Jerusalem on a donkey; when he rode on a beast of burden; when he came to bear the burden of our sins. But now he

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symbolically rides a magnificent mount, a steed of splendor. I know as an old cowboy, it's always embarrassing to ride a donkey. It's even embarrassing to ride a mule. I'm not even real fond of the Tennessee Walking Horse. I want a good strong quarter horse. But here, oh, my goodness, to ride upon a steed such as this, symbolic of the conquering generals of Rome and the majestic procession of triumph.

And notice how he describes the rider, "and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True." Beloved, can there be a more fitting title for the King of glory? A more fitting description of the person and the work of our Savior? I think not. He is faithful, which carries the idea that he is totally trustworthy; he is totally dependable; that all that he has decreed in eternity past is going to come to fruition. Moreover, he is true which carried the idea of he is real; he is genuine; he is the essence of truth. He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father but through me."

Then John says, "and in righteousness He judges and wages war." You see friends, here we see both the motive and the mission of his return. He is coming to judge and to conquer. The context here is that of the forces of the beast who is the antichrist must be vanquished and all who have opposed him must be punished and so forth. So he comes as both the Judge and Executioner of those who have repeatedly and deliberately spurned all of his warnings; those who have ignored all of the invitations to repent over the seven years of pre-kingdom judgments before the Lord returns to establish his kingdom.

Then in verse 12 he says, "His eyes are a flame of fire." We've seen this symbolism in Revelation in earlier passages in chapter 1 and in chapter 2 and it speaks of the fierceness of his wrath against his enemies. We all have a little glimpse of that eyes being a flame of fire, remember when your mom or your dad looked at you when you were sitting out there in the church service goofing off? Well, this is way beyond that. That's the idea here. Here we are reminded of what the author of Hebrews said in chapter 4, verse 13, "there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Imagine the penetrating laser focus of the omniscient eyes of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And John says, "and on His head are many diadems." This speaks of a crown of royalty, rulers, a ruler's crown emblematic of a king's authority.

But then John sees something else that identifies this rider. In verse 12 he says, "and He has a name upon Him which no one knows except Himself." Folks, it's futile to speculate upon that name because he alone knows what it is, he alone knows what it means. It was inscrutable to John, it's inscrutable to us, but certainly this can speak to the fact that he is an ineffable indescribable Savior and King.

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And in verse 13 we read that, "He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood." Now this has nothing to do with the blood of Christ shed upon the cross. That is not at all the context here. The context here has nothing to do with the work of atonement, nothing to do with redemption. The context is that of war. This is a reference to the blood of his enemies. So the imagery here is of the King clothed with a robe dipped in blood. This speaks of the slaughter frankly that will occur at Armageddon when the Lion of the tribe of Judah takes vengeance on his enemies.

Then the scene of his arrival closes with yet another mention of the warrior Messiah's name. Verse 13, "and His name is called The Word of God." John spoke to this earlier, didn't he, in his Gospel? He was the divine Logos. He was the very revelation of truth. He in his person was the revelation of the purposes of God. All of that found its full expression in the purpose and person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But he doesn't stop there, he says in verse 14, "And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses." In other passages, we are told that his army will include the angels from heaven. Jesus spoke about that in Matthew 25, but here they are not mentioned. You must understand that the troops in this text refers to the army of the saints. Folks, this is you. This is me. This is the regiment of the redeemed. This is consistent with chapter 17, verse 14 of Revelation, those who are with the King of kings and Lord of lords are "the called and the chosen and the faithful." This speaks of the elect of God that comes with him.

This is further confirmed by their attire. He says that we will be clothed in fine linen white and clean. This portrayal is used in chapter 19, verse 7, to describe the bride of the Lamb who has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."

But I also find it interesting that unlike their leader who has a sharp sword, the army is unarmed. We have no sword. We have no bows. We have no arrows. There is nothing symbolic here to say that we're going to be part of the fight. We don't even have any armor here. We have no helmets, not armor, nor will we need it since we will be immortal, impervious to injury. And there is no mention frankly anywhere that we will be involved in any battle, the battle of Armageddon or any other battle when we return. After all, our Almighty Sovereign needs no help, right? He can handle it all on his own.

And it's astounding to me that we will accompany our Commander, the Lord Jesus. In fact, Paul speaks of this in Colossians 3:4, he says, "When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." I cannot fathom what it will

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The Most Terrifying Surprise

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10
Preached on: Monday, May 30, 2016

be like to be a part of that approaching army. I remember the first time when I was up on the mount and I could look out and I could see the whole realm of Megiddo, the Valley of Megiddo where that final battle is going to be fought and I could only imagine what it would be like to one day be coming with the Lord and to see all that was going to happen. I remember it just brought me to tears. I hope I can bring some of you there and let you see that. It's an astounding thought to be able to descend upon the demon infested earth, charging the vast forces of the antichrist, and to see them surrounding Jerusalem and to watch all of that be destroyed.

Folks, don't you know that all of this would have just left the early saints speechless? It's kind of like, "Do you know what? I had forgotten all about the persecution. I'm so excited about what God is up to." And Jesus also described his rival, remember in Matthew 24:27? He says, "For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky." I believe this to be for a number of reasons, the Shekinah glory, the presence of the living Christ. "And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other." So, folks, this is what Paul is speaking of when he said in verse 7, "when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire," and in verse 10, "when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed - for our testimony to you was believed."

Then finally because our time has escaped us, he speaks of the reward of Christ. Notice verse 6, "For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief," the term literally means "rest; refreshment; restoration." "To give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well." It's fascinating to think that because of God's justice we are going to receive relief but the wicked will receive retribution. We are going to receive rest. It's interesting, in Scripture the Bible speaks of rest coming to believers in various ways. There is, first of all, the rest that we experience when we come to faith in Christ and then suddenly, the crushing weight of guilt and sin is removed and we enjoy the presence of our Lord. This is why Jesus said, "Come unto Me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest."

There is also the rest that God gives to the afflicted, to those who are being persecuted because of their faith. 1 Peter 5:10, "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of

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all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." I had to remind a dear brother in South Sudan of this very thing as he was broken-hearted over the persecution he was experiencing with his ministry and his wife and children.

Then there, of course, is the eternal rest of the redeemed that we will enjoy at death. But I believe here in this passage, Paul is speaking primarily of millennial rest, that's the primary reference here, when the saints will enjoy the splendors of paradise regained and the Messianic kingdom when they will enjoy reigning with the glorious King. In fact, Peter described this in Acts 3:19, that it will be times of refreshing. There is the same concept. "Refreshing from the presence of the Lord, the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time."

Then, finally, Paul says in verse 10, he speaks more of this relief, he says, "He will come to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed - for our testimony to you was believed." Folks, this is just staggering to me. What he's referring to here is the survivors of the pre-kingdom judgments in the time of the tribulation. They are going to marvel at Christ as he comes. They are going to even marvel at all of us who are with Christ. And I think about this and just rejoice to know that I will finally be able to glorify Christ in the way that I've only wished I could do throughout my life and you will as well. This will be a time when every vestige of sin will have been banished; when the effulgence of the glory of God will be able to emanate from me and from you; where the countenance of his majesty will blaze off of our face.

And all of these dear saints are seeing all of this and they're marveling at it. They're seeing a preview of what they will experience. I don't know about you but when I looked in the mirror, I see things that I don't like and it seems like every month, every year I don't like things even more. I think you know what that's like. You look at yourself and you wish things were a bit different physically, right? Maybe not you but I do. You know, the same thing is true spiritually. I look at myself and I don't like what I see. I wish it was more like Christ. It's frustrating. And then when you combine the physical with the spiritual limitations, I'm just not very pretty. Pretty ugly. Beloved, no one looks at me and marvels at Christ. Nobody looks at you and marvels at Christ. It's not to say that they don't see some of Christ but, folks, compared to what they will see someday when the Lord returns, this is just a candle. I just marvel at this and they will marvel at it as well when Christ comes to be glorified in his saints on that day and to be marveled at among all who believe.

You know, it's for this reason that Paul said in Romans 8:18, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be

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revealed to us." Then he said this, "For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for," what? "The revealing of the sons of God." That's what Paul is speaking of here, that time when he will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of his glory by the exertion of his power that he has even to subject all things to himself, Philippians 3:21.

Oh, child of God, what hope we have in Christ. And for those of you who may still be scoffing at all of this, please know that unless you humble your heart and obey the Gospel of God you will one day experience the most terrifying surprise in all of history, the day of God's judgment. And also know that after today, you can never say in this life or in the state of your eternal death that you were not warned. And dear believer, may I encourage you to get serious about serving the King of kings. He's coming. Jesus is coming and he's coming soon. We need to be excited about the reality that one day we are going to be revealed with him in glory. We need to look for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave himself for us. Amazing truths, right? Just amazing truths. Praise God for them. Praise God for his word.

Father, thank you for all that you have communicated to us today. May these things bear much fruit in our lives. And Lord, I pray for those who really do not know you. They have not really obeyed the Gospel of God, Lord, they have never come to a place where they've been so broken over their sin that they've run to the foot of the cross and cried out for a mercy that they do not deserve. Lord, give them no rest, make them miserable until they find life and forgiveness and righteousness in you. I ask all of this in the precious name of our Savior and our Lord. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You've been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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