

TWENTY FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

TEXT: ~~SMB~~ **1 THESSALONIANS 4:13 18.**

13 *But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope. 14* *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. 15* *For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. 16* *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; 17* *then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 18* *Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*

LIVING AND DEAD WHEN CHRIST RETURNS.

Paul writes these words to comfort Christians who were troubled about what would take place at the resurrection of the dead. Shall all rise together? Shall those living on the earth at the last day meet Christ before others? These and like thoughts worried them. Here Paul answers them by saying that Christ would take all his believers to himself at the same time, etc. This epistle text you will find richly expounded in “The Explanation of Certain Epistles,” which appeared on special occasions. [The Miscellaneous Sermons of the Year 1532.]

TWENTY SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

TEXT: ~~SMR~~² THESSALONIANS 1:3 10.

3 *We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren, even as it is meet, for that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the love of each one of you all toward one another aboundeth; 4 so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions which ye endure; 5 which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God; to the end that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: 6 if so be that it is a righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to them that afflict you, 7 and to you that are afflicted rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, 8 rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: 9 who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 10 when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at in all them that believed (because our testimony unto you was believed) in that day.*

GOD'S JUDGMENT WHEN CHRIST RETURNS.

1. First, Paul has words of praise for his Church at Thessalonica. In view of its faith and its love it was one of the first rank. Patiently it stood firm, and even increased, under crosses of affliction. The apostle's intent in commending these people is to incite to perseverance. He would hold them up to others as an example an illustration of the fruits resulting when the Gospel is preached and received. He also points out in what the edification and success of the true Church of Christ consist. Then he consoles them for their patient sufferings with the mention of the glorious coming of Christ the Lord, which shall mean their final redemption, the recompense of peace and joy for their tribulations, and the bringing of eternal wrath upon their persecutors.

2. This consolation Paul draws from their sufferings and God's righteous judgment, by which he makes plain why God lets them suffer here on earth, what is his purpose in it. Looking at the Christian community with the eye of human reason and reflection, no more wretched, tormented, persecuted, unhappy people are in evidence on earth than those who confess and glory in Christ the crucified. In the world they are continually persecuted, tormented and assailed by the devil with all manner of wretchedness, misfortune, distress and death. Even to their own perceptions, it seems as if they surely are forgotten and forsaken by God in the sight of mankind. For he allows them to remain prostrate under the weight of the cross, while others in the world, particularly their persecutors, live in the enjoyment of honor and fortune, of happiness, power and riches, with everything moving to the fulfillment of their desires. The Scriptures frequently deplore this condition of things, especially the Psalms, and Paul in ~~4:15~~ 1 Corinthians 15:19 confesses: "If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable."

CHRISTIAN'S SUFFERINGS LEAD TO HAPPINESS.

3. Now, assuredly this state of affairs cannot continue without end; it cannot be God's intention to permit Christians thus to suffer continually while they live, to die because of it and remain dead. It would be incompatible with his eternal, divine truth and honor manifest in his Word. For there he declares he will be the God of the pious, of them who fear and trust him, and gives them unspeakable promises. Necessarily, then, he has planned a future state for Christians and for non Christians, in either instance unlike what they know on earth. Possibly one of the chief reasons why God permits Christians to suffer on earth is to make plain the distinction between their reward and that of the ungodly. In the sufferings of believing Christians, and in the wickedness, tyranny, rage, and persecution directed by the unrighteous against the godly, is certain indication of a future life unlike this and a final judgment of God in which all men, godly and wicked, shall be forever recompensed.

4. Notice, Paul means to say here when he speaks of the tribulations and sufferings of Christians: "These afflictions are the indication of God's righteous judgment, and a sign you are worthy of the kingdom of God for which you suffer." In other words: "O beloved Christians, regard your sufferings as dear and precious. Think not God is angry with you, or has forgotten you, because he allows you to endure these things. They are your

great help and comfort, for they show God will be a righteous judge, will richly bless you and avenge you upon your persecutors. Yes, therein you have unfailing assurance. You may rejoice, and console yourselves, believing without the shadow of a doubt that you belong to the kingdom of God, and have been made worthy of it, because you suffer for its sake.

5. Whatever the Christian suffers here on earth at the hands of the devil and the world, befalls him simply for the sake of the name of God and for his Word, True, as a baptized child of God the Christian should justly enjoy unalloyed goodness, comfort and peace on earth; but since he must still dwell in the kingdom of the devil, who infuses sin and death into human flesh, he must endure the devil. Yet all Satan's inflictions and the world's plagues, persecutions, terrors, tortures, even the taking of the Christian's life, and all its abuse, is wrought in violence and injustice. But to offset this, the Christian has the comforting assurance of God's Word that because he suffers for the sake of the kingdom of Christ and of God he shall surely be eternally partaker of that kingdom. Certain it is, no one will be worthy of it unless he suffers for it.

6. "If so be that it is a righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to them that afflict you," continues the apostle. It is impossible it should continue to be, as now, well with the world and evil with you. God's righteousness will not admit of it. Just because he is a righteous judge, things must be eventually different: the godly must have eternal good, and the wicked, on the other hand, must be punished forever. Otherwise God's judgment would not be righteous; in other words, he would not be God. Now, since this is an impossible proposition, since God's righteousness and truth are immutable, in his capacity of judge he must perforce, in due time, come from heaven, when he shall have assembled his Christians, and avenge them of their enemies, recompense the latter according to their merits, and confer eternal rest and peace upon his followers for the temporal sufferings they have endured here.

GOD DOES NOT FORGET HIS CHILDREN.

7. Christians should certainly expect this and comfort themselves in the confidence that God will not permit the wrongs of his people to continue unpunished and unavenged. We might think he had forgotten were we to judge from the facts that godly Abel was shamefully murdered by his brother, that God's prophets and martyrs John the Baptist, Jeremiah, Paul

and others suffered death at the hands of bloodhounds like the Herods, Neros and other shameless, sanguinary tyrants of the sort, and this when God had, even in this life, given glorious testimony to their being his beloved children. A judgment must be forthcoming that tyrants may suffer pains and punishments, and that the godly, delivered from sufferings, may have eternal rest and joy. Let all the world know God does not forget, even after death.

8. This is the consolation the future judgment at the resurrection of the dead holds, that, as God's righteousness requires, the saints shall receive for their sufferings a supremely rich and glorious recompense. Paul seems to present as the principal reason why God must punish the world with everlasting pain, the fact that the world has inflicted tribulations on Christians. Apparently his words imply that the perpetrations of the devil and the world their supreme contempt and hatred of God's name and Word, their blasphemies of these, their wickedness and disobedience in other respects, whereby they bring upon themselves everlasting pain and damnation — that for these sins against himself God is not so ready to punish as for their persecution and torment of his poor, believing Christians. This truth is indicated where we read that Christ on the last day shall say: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels . . . inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me." ~~4254~~ Matthew 25:41 and 45.

9. Paul's further observations, concerning the manner of the judgment to come and the painful punishment of the ungodly, is sufficiently clear as rendered, and is also explained in the sermon on the Gospel text. Further explanation here is unnecessary.

