



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Endtime, Last Judgment

November 11, 2007

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Jeremiah 26:1-6

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 90

Second Lesson: 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

Gospel: Luke 19:11-27

### Payback Day is Coming

Picture yourself as a child and you are in the midst of an argument with a sibling—if you didn't have a sibling, just picture it, alright? You are back there in the living room and you are fighting over something very important that you can't remember now because nothing you fight about is really that important. And you get to fighting and something gets broken and Mom or Dad or both come in, and you blame the other sibling. The other sibling then, as they are getting punished, looks at you and as Mom and Dad are walking out, they breathe viciously under their breath and say to you, "Don't worry, payback is coming."

So how do you like that word "payback" right about then? I suppose it depends, doesn't it? If it is your younger sibling by about 10 years, you probably aren't too worried, right? If it's your older, bigger sibling who has had a tendency of paying you back in ways that are not pleasant, then you might not be so thrilled about that word "payback" at that point in time, right? "Payback" can be a scary word.

So let me ask you this? How did you feel this morning when you heard God talk about payback? Did you notice that in there? "The day is coming" Paul told the Thessalonians "when Jesus is going to come back and pay back trouble to those who trouble you." In essence, you could say Judgment Day, the Last Day, when Christ returns to judge the living and the dead, is "payback day" and its coming. So how are you feeling? Are you looking forward to it? Can't wait for it? A little frightened? A little scared? A little concerned? That's a pretty pivotal question, isn't it? So think about that one today. What do you think about that word "payback" in this context?

By nature, I suppose you could say each one of us should be shuddering at the idea that God is going to pay us back for what our sins deserve. God has laid it out pretty clearly and pretty simply, right? Anyone can understand it. What does God say? "Be holy as I the Lord your God am holy." Jesus repeated it in Matthew. "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." There is no wiggle room there, is there? No "try hard," no "do your best," no "find someone worse than you"—God doesn't say to compare yourself to someone else. He says, "Compare yourself to me. I am holy. I am perfect. I am without sin. That is how I want you to be when I come to judge the living and the dead. And if you are holy and perfect, heaven is yours. The doors are open."

So how are you thinking about payback right now? A little worried? Looking forward to it? Left on our own, we know that we would stand shoulder to shoulder with those Paul is talking about here—those who were troubling the Thessalonians by persecuting

them. We deserve the same thing they deserve. We deserve the payback that is an eternity in hell because we have disobeyed God. We have sinned against God. God says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." There are times we don't even love ourselves because we are so warped and twisted by sin and our sinful nature let alone love your neighbor. You and I might say, "I've never killed anyone." God says don't murder. But then we remember that God says anyone who hates his brother is a murderer. Now I have problems, don't I? We say, "I've never cheated on my husband or my wife," but God says that anyone who looks at someone else with lust in their hearts has committed adultery. There goes the whole entertainment industry out the window for you, doesn't it?

You and I fall short. You and I deserve hell. So when you hear that word "payback" in those words that I read to you from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, it can be scary for us because we know that we should be shoulder to shoulder with those who are going to be sent to hell for all eternity.

But there was another phrase in there that I read that hopefully you heard, because it kind of comes out of the blue, and it comes without explanation because Paul had already explained it to the Thessalonians. But did you notice that phrase that describes that day when Jesus is going to come back on the Last Day? It says "with his powerful angels." Other places in Scripture tell us he comes in his complete, full glory—not like when he came to Bethlehem as a little baby in those swaddling clothes, but the next time he comes. It is going to be in his full glory, with all the angels with him, and everyone is going to be gathered together at once, and Jesus is going to separate the believers and the unbelievers—the believers on his right, the "sheep" he calls them in Matthew—the unbelievers, the "goats," on the left. And then he is going to say, "Depart from me," and those are all going to be sent off to hell. But in describing that day in the paragraph I just read to you, did you notice how he said that those people will be "shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed."

There is an interesting phrase in there, a powerful phrase, a phrase that makes all the difference to you and to me when we think about the Last Judgment. He will be "glorified in his holy people." God has provided for himself a holy people—people that are blameless, not because they have never sinned, but because God has made them holy through the life of Jesus in our place and through the death of Jesus in our place. God demanded perfection of us. So Jesus, true God, became man and lived in this world perfectly and kept every law that you and I break. He didn't hate. He didn't lust. He didn't fail to love God and fail to love himself and fail to love others as God had demanded, like you and I often do. Instead he was perfect in our place. And then, all the times that you and I have fallen short, all the punishment that those sins deserve, God piled on Jesus and nailed them to the cross. So he was punished in our place and took away all of our sins.

Then he says that when we believe that Jesus is our Savior, when his Spirit works faith in our hearts, we are his holy people. "This includes you," Paul said, "because you believed our testimony to you." This is an amazing and incredible thing that gives us

confidence to face the Last Judgment, to face this “payback day” because we know we are not going to be paid back with what we deserve. We are going to be paid back for what Jesus has done for us. He was holy in our place. He washed away our sins, whether it was in the waters of our baptism like we saw this morning—a child that was sinful, now clothed with the holiness of Jesus so that they are God’s child by his power. That is the key. It is God’s power that does the work. It’s God’s power that gives us faith. It’s God’s power that washes away our sins. It’s not our ability to be holy, because we can’t do it.

So think about this. When God looks at you, he has declared you holy through Jesus’ life and death. When his Spirit leads you to believe this truth, you are clothed in the robe of his righteousness. God doesn’t see your envy. God doesn’t see your jealousy. God doesn’t see your bitterness. God doesn’t see your sinful worry. God doesn’t see your sinful pride. God doesn’t see your arrogance. When he looks at you and me, he sees the perfection of Jesus.

So when we lay our head on our pillow at night when we go to bed, we do it with a confidence that God will be glorified in us when he comes again—whether it’s in 10 minutes or it’s in 10,000 years, it makes no difference. You and I can be confident that “payback day” for us is not something that frightens us or fears us. God is coming to pay us back for what he has given us and for what he has made us.

So as we go through life now, we can do what we learned about in our Psalm today or what Jesus’ Parable told us in the Gospel that he was trying to teach us—make the most use of the time and the abilities and the Word, the Gospel, that God gives to you. What did we sing in the Psalm? “Help us to mark our days aright that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” A heart of wisdom—that we see that the most precious treasure we have is not the things of this world, but this Gospel message that tells us we are forgiven. This Gospel message that sustains us when we are worried, when we are uncertain, when we are troubled, when we are facing life’s challenges and life’s worries; you and I know we don’t face them alone because the One who died for us is at our side. You and I also know that when we look at the Last Judgment, we don’t have to be afraid. It’s not a day of wrath or a day of mourning for we who believe. It’s a day of joy where we will be reunited perfectly with our heavenly Father, with the Son, and with the Spirit to spend eternity in the glory of heaven.

You and I broke the lamp, but Jesus took the punishment in our place. Heaven is open to us. Rejoice in this truth!