Lownes Free Church Sunday Morning – March 18, 2018

*The Last Days! What happens next?*

Life Lessons from Four Apostles

Jesus will return: Relief is on the way!

Prayer and Thanks to God who is Merciful *and* Just.

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

A few months after his first letter, Paul pens another to the Thessalonians, who remain faithful in persecution. He reminds them of the principles and particulars of Jesus’ return: On the very day Jesus returns, He will bring relief to His people and retribution to His enemies, *i.,e,* all who have rejected Him and His offer of grace in the gospel. So a believer’s obedience is contrasted to the unbeliever’s disobedience, and each is rewarded in kind for the choice.

***It is right to thank God for our faith!*** vv. 1-4

Faith itself is a gift from God, as are all of its fruits. When we are trusting God and being salt and light to those around us, it’s good to praise God and thank Him for His work in us. Ephesians 2:8-10

***We can “see” faith in the works of love God has empowered.***

***It is right of God both to reward and punish.*** vv. 5-10

The gospel perfectly satisfies both God’s mercy and justice. Just as God has remained righteous in showing mercy to sinners (not letting them off, but paying for their sins in Jesus), He is fully just in punishing forever those who reject Him and His offer of forgiveness. The believers’ eternal relief and the unbelievers’ eternal judgment begin the same day.

Just as faith produces works, so also unbelief produces disobedience to the gospel. The good works will be rewarded and the disobedience will be punished, and God, as always, remains righteous.

***We will see God’s righteousness on full display at Christ’s return.***

***It is right to trust God to complete His work in us.*** vv. 11, 12

The pinnacle of God’s grace is his “counting as worthy” sinners who clearly are not worthy, in and of themselves. This principle of justifying the ungodly encourages us to continue in trusting God to complete what he has begun in us, love yielding good works. Philippians 4:6, 7

***We give praise to our faithful Lord for saving and*** ***sustaining grace.***

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***Last Days Life Lesson***

***We can be confident and faithful in our trials***

***since God’s righteousness will be vindicated at Christ’s coming,***

***both in punishing those who refused to obey the gospel,***

***and in rescuing those counted worthy of His saving grace.***

***Going Deeper--For Growth Groups:***

1. Jesus taught us to love our enemies, and yet God eventually judges them. How do we reconcile these ideas? Why is punishment eternal?

2. Paul notes twice, in v. 5 and v. 11, that we are “counted worthy” of salvation. How is that different from being worthy?

3. We think of the gospel as a blessed set of facts, but Paul also points out that it is to be “obeyed.” How is the gospel also a command?

4. Here God’s judgment is portrayed as an instantaneous event, but the prophets and Revelation (16:12-16) speak of “Armageddon.” In light of Psalm 2, how long do you think such a battle with God would last?