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Have you ever served on a jury, or watched a trial on TV? At the end of the trial, at sentencing, how many times have you heard both sides say “That’s the right decision”? I don’t think I’ve ever heard that, since the people were in court because they couldn’t agree in the first place. After the trial, you may hear someone threaten an appeal because they don’t agree with the decision. In our world, I don’t think you’ll ever find an instance of perfect justice.

But there will come a time when you will. Today is Last Judgment Sunday, a day that we look forward to as Christians. On that day our Savior will come again, riding the clouds of glory to declare His final verdict for every single human being who has ever lived. On that day, we will witness “**GOD’S PERFECT JUSTICE.**” As believers, we look forward to receiving the blessings Jesus won for us even though we may be experiencing pain as we live in this world. But pain now is much better than punishment forever, don’t you think? Come with me into God’s Word today and listen to the wise words of our Lord, to encourage you as you endure the trials and tribulations of life.

### ***Part One: Pain now, or***

Paul is writing to the believers in Thessalonica who were undergoing some rather severe persecution. Oh, he could have started out by saying “yeah, you guys have it tough.” He could have said “it’s not fair the way you are being treated.” He could have, but he didn’t. He started out by praising the good stuff God had been doing in their lives. Listen again to his words: “***We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.***” These suffering believers were wonderful examples of standing firm in the faith to so many others. Plus, their fellow believers could see, in a very real way, how God gives strength to His children as they suffer. Words of praise. Words of commendation.

We can only imagine what these persecutions and trials were like. There are hints from history and other early writings. We can assume that some of these trials were psychological. Because they believed in Jesus, they were in the minority. And so, they were shamed. They were ridiculed. They were accused of being mentally unbalance. We can also assume that some of these trials were physical. Some were beaten. Some were thrown out of their rental houses. Some lost their jobs. Some were sued and lost anything of earthly value. Some were killed. Truly, these believers were treated like dirt simply because they believed in Jesus.

That’s why it is so amazing to us that these believers continued to grow in their faith and love for each other. Oh sure. There were times that their faith dipped a bit. That’s one reason why God had Paul write this letter to them. God was the One who had given them their faith in Jesus. God was the One that was making sure they kept their faith in Jesus. And God is the One who continued to strengthen their faith in the Savior.

That’s what Paul is pointing to when he says “***All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right.***” He chose to give you faith, and your sufferings prove that He did. You wouldn’t suffer for Jesus if you didn’t believe in Him. God told us that believers would suffer because they believed. Your suffering is evidence that you are a believer.

But perhaps they had a question - at the lowest point in their lives, struggling with all the pain that being a believer brings. Is it worth it? Listen to what is in store for believers. They would be reflectors of the glory of Jesus Christ. On the Last Day He will “***be glorified in his holy people***”. The rest and relief that believers will enjoy from their troubles means glory for Jesus. We are the evidence of His love, His power and His grace. Look at what Jesus accomplished in us and through us. What a wonderful display we will be of Jesus’ glory! On top of that, He will give us a perfectly delightful life with Him forever. No tears, no pain, no arguing with our neighbors. Days filled with praising God before His throne and wonderful times spent with Him and all believers. Abraham, Isaac, mom and dad, grandparents, Moses and David. Paradise! All this will be ours, not because we suffer, but because God chose us to give this to us.

We need this reminder from our Lord. So often we are tempted to think we get heaven because

we suffer here on earth. A few years ago I was talking to someone who was going through a rough time in life. After a few minutes, he said this: "Well, I deserve to go to heaven because I'm going through hell here on earth." Um, not really. If we are Christians, we know we will suffer for believing in Christ. Some people will make fun of us. "You really believe in that old book?" Some people may cut you out of their lives because you won't get drunk with them. Some may ridicule you because you won't skip church like they do. Your boss might fire you because you won't lie for him. Your boyfriend or girlfriend might break up with you because you won't break the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment with them. You may feel alone and hurt at times because you believe in Jesus and want to honor His name. And, we may forget that we have been chosen to reflect His glory in heaven. Oh, yes, Christians will experience pain in this world. But on Judgment Day? Peace, painlessness and the reflected glory of our Lord!

Being a Christian will bring pain into your life, but not being a Christian means punishment forever.

### ***Part Two: Punishment forever***

On Judgment Day the final payment for sin is due to those who rejected Jesus' payment for sin. Oh, Jesus did pay for the sins of all people of all time on the cross, but many rejected that payment. All of us will see Jesus ***"revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels."*** Unbelievers will be punished with everlasting destruction, separated from God's presence and power forever.

This punishment is for those who reject that there is a personal God. I call them star wars believers. They believe there is a force directing life, but don't believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Then there are those who don't believe there is a God, and some who aren't sure if there is a God or not. This punishment is also for those who don't believe that Jesus paid for their sins, or that He is true God. The list of such non-Christian groups is long. Such unbelievers will be reminded by fire for an eternity that there is a real triune God come Judgment Day. Endless pain, endless suffering, endless punishment.

That would have been our destiny if God had not intervened. You see, no one chooses to believe in Jesus. It is God's gift to us! And we might look at ourselves and ask "why me? Why would God want me to be with Him for all eternity?"

Here's the answer. He created us to live with Him. It started out perfect with Adam and Eve. They had no sin. They enjoyed a wonderful relationship with God just as He desired. But then sin corrupted this relationship. After they fell into sin, they blamed one another. They refused to admit the truth. They no longer looked at God the same way. Their relationship with the perfect God of heaven and earth was shattered. And they suffered. God knew that they couldn't rebuild their relationship with Him. And neither can we. We are sinful and He was sinless. So, He set in motion a plan to restore that relationship with us that He wanted all along. Jesus was the restorer. His perfect life covers our sinful life. His perfect death cleans away the crud of sin and makes us shine like the stars in the heavens. He is the One who restores us simply because He wants to show us His love and glory.

She was weeding in the garden one day without her gloves, and as she washed her hands she realized that her wedding ring was gone. She searched for it for hours, but didn't find it. She was heartbroken. It was lost. Over the summer she looked and looked, but no results. The next spring her husband was tilling the garden and found her ring. It was dirty. It had been hit by the tiller a few times. A few prongs were bent or missing and the ring itself was bent. He was a handy guy, so he repaired and cleaned it. He buffed it until it shown like new, and then brought it to his wife. Well, you can just imagine her joy when she saw that ring!

In the same way, Jesus repaired and renewed us in God's eyes, all by Himself. We are His bride, the ones He designed to have a full and complete relationship with Him.

So, how do we now live, knowing that's our future? Some might get lazy, thinking they're the chosen ones and can do anything they want. But you might lose your faith, your eternal future if you ignore God's Word. God encourages us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Treasure God's gift of paradise and respond with thanks. Search the Scriptures. Come to Bible study at church and at home. Check out a devotion book from our library and dig into the Bible. Listen to the voice of your Savior. Pray that the Holy Spirit would open your eyes and heart as you read the Word.

As we look to Judgment Day, there's one fact that keeps coming up again and again. A person only gets to heaven if they believe in Jesus and what He has done. And we ask ourselves the question -

what can I do to be a bridge for the Holy Spirit to work? How can I bring honor and glory to my Lord? Here's a few suggestions. You could write and mail a handwritten note to someone who is suffering, with just a short message inside. "I'm praying for you." Or, you could talk to them, telling them of a particular Bible passage that helped you through a rough time. Or, you could help them with your time and energy, showing them that you do sincerely care for them.

We know our actions don't get us into heaven. That's entirely due to God's efforts. But our actions as believers are a response to this gift. It gives glory to our Lord now, and will on the Last Day. On the Last Day our Lord will point to our actions as proof that we are His children. And who knows? Others will marvel at what Jesus accomplished in us and through us.

Until that day, we'll experience pain. Satan, the world and our own sinful flesh won't stop attacking and tormenting us. But there will come a day when we will experience **"GOD'S PERFECT JUSTICE."** May Jesus be glorified through us on that day!

AMEN