

THE WICKED
BIG IDEA: One day believers will get rest from suffering while the wicked get judgment.
DATE: Wednesday, November 4 and Sunday, November 8, 2026
SCRIPTURE: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-10 (CSB)

OPENING QUESTION

Let's test your idiom knowledge! *Are these sayings from the Bible or not?*
Bite the dust; broken heart; caught red-handed; by the skin of your teeth; spill the beans; can a leopard changes its spots; beat around the bush; a drop in the bucket; the apple of his eye; rub someone the wrong way; the writing is on the wall; basket case; no rest for the wicked

Leaders: read the following idioms and tell your group to raise their hands when they think it is from the Bible.

Idioms trivia– from the Bible or not?

- Bite the dust — YES (Psalm 72:9)
- Broken heart — YES (Psalm 34:18)
- Caught red-handed - NO
- By the skin of your teeth — YES (Job 19:20)
- Spill the beans - NO
- Can a leopard change its spots? — YES (Jeremiah 13:23)
- Beat around the bush - NO
- A drop in the bucket — YES (Isaiah 40:15)
- The apple of his eye — YES (Deuteronomy 32:10)
- Rub someone the wrong way - NO
- The writing is on the wall — YES (Daniel 5)
- Basket case – NO
- There's no rest for the wicked – SORT OF! (Isaiah 48:22; 57:20-21)

Biblical Origin: The phrase originally stated, **"There is no *peace* for the wicked."** In its original context, it meant that unrepentant sinners or people who turn away from God cannot experience inner peace, spiritual rest, or salvation.

Over the centuries the meaning shifted from divine punishment to a humorous way of saying that work and life duties never stop.

In today's passage, Paul addresses the fact there will be no peace for the wicked – for those who have not put their faith and belief in Jesus as their Lord and Savior – for a judgment is coming.

SETTING THE STAGE

The Christians in Thessalonica were grateful to God for Paul's first letter, but it did not immediately solve all their problems. In fact, the persecution grew worse, and some believers thought they were living in the time of the tribulation. Then a letter arrived claiming to be from Paul, stating that the day of the Lord was actually present. Needless to say, the assembly was confused and frightened by this prospect. Some of the believers concluded that since the Lord's coming was so near, they ought to quit their jobs and spend their time waiting for him. This meant that the other members were under an extra burden to care for them. Satan was working overtime; as the lion, he was seeking to devour, and as the serpent, he was seeking to deceive. It was in response to these needs that Paul wrote his 2nd letter.

SCRIPTURE READING

2 Thessalonians 1:1-10 (CSB)

Paul, Silvanus [Silas] and Timothy: To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [2]Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[3]We ought to thank God always for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, since your faith is flourishing and the love each one of you has for one another is increasing. [4]Therefore, we ourselves boast about you among God's churches – about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and afflictions that you are enduring. [5]It is clear evidence of God's righteous judgment that you will be counted worthy of God's kingdom, for which you also are suffering, [6]since it is just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you [7]and to give relief to you who are afflicted, along with us. This will take place at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his powerful angels, [8]when he takes vengeance with flaming fire on those who don't know God and on those who don't obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. [9]They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the Lord's presence and from his glorious strength [10]on that day when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at by all those who have believed, because our testimony among you was believed.

DISCUSSION

THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF PRAISE
READ: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

How did Paul encourage the believers through thanksgiving? For what specific blessings did he give thanks?

From the Commentary:

Their faith was growing (v. 3a). A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted. New believers must expect their faith to be tried, because this is the way God proves whether or not their decision is genuine. Faith, like a muscle, must be exercised to grow stronger. Tribulation and persecution are God's way to strengthen our faith.

Their love was abounding (v. 3b). Again, this was an answer to Paul's previous prayer. Suffering can make us selfish, but when suffering is mixed with grace and faith, it produces love. When Christians suffer, their faith reaches *upward* to God, and their love reaches *outward* to the their fellow believers.

Their patience was increasing (v. 4). Perhaps "perseverance" would be the best translation of this Greek word. You do not become patient and persevering by reading a book or listening to a lecture. *You have to suffer.* These believers were enduring persecutions, trials, pressure and trouble. They were not having an easy time. But God never wastes suffering. Trials work for us, not against us. If we trust God and yield to Him, then trials will produce patience and maturity in our lives. If we rebel and fight our circumstances, then we will remain immature and impatient. God permits trials that He might build character into our lives. He can grow a mushroom overnight, but it takes many years – and many storms – to grow a mighty oak.

Their testimony was helping others (v. 4a). Not only can suffering help us to grow, but we can then help others to grow. God encourages us that we may encourage others. We are not to be cisterns that receive and keep, but channels that receive and share.

How can praise or words of affirmation from others grow our faith? How can it address feelings of frustration or inadequacy in a believer's faith life?

An easy life can lead to a shallow faith. What do think of that statement? The great men and women of Hebrews 11 all suffered in one way or another, or faced tremendous obstacles, so that their faith could grow. Paul had prayed for the believers in Thessalonica, that their faith might be perfected, and now he thanked God for answered prayer.

SHARE: One of the best weapons for fighting Satan is praise. Describe a time when you have been inspired or encouraged by watching someone handle a difficult time gracefully, as Paul was encouraged as he watched this church.

ASK: How can praising God help you through suffering?

Paul had every reason to praise God and give thanks for what God was doing in the lives of these young Christians. But did you notice that one element was missing – hope? "Faith, hope, and love" had characterized these believers from the beginning (1 Thess. 1:3), but Paul gave thanks only for their faith and love. Why? Apparently they were confused about their hope. This leads us to the second encouragement.

THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF PROMISE
READ: 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

From the Commentary: No matter how difficult their present circumstances may have been, the Thessalonican believers had a secure and glorious future. In fact, their sufferings were evidence that God was righteous, working out His great plan for them. We are prone to think that suffering proves that God does not care, when just the opposite is true. Furthermore, the way we act in times of trial proves to others that God is at work.

Three experiences are involved in the promises of God for His people.

1. **Reward (v. 5).** "...you will be counted worthy of God's kingdom, for which you also are suffering". This was one of God's purposes in permitting their suffering. It does not suggest that their suffering earned them the right to go to heaven, because we know that they were saved through faith in Christ. The word "also" indicated that this worthiness related both to their present experience and their future entrance into God's glorious kingdom. One day Jesus will turn the tables and the wicked will suffer while the believers are rewarded. Our Lord never promised us that life here would be easy; in fact, He taught that we would have to face difficulties and fight battles. But He also promised a future reward for all who were faithful.
2. **Repay (vv. 6, 7b-9).** God will repay justice to the lost, but rest to the saved. To recompense means to repay. Certainly, the wicked who persecute the godly do not always receive their just payment in this life. In fact, that apparent prosperity of the wicked and difficulty of the godly have posed a problem for many of God' people. Why live a godly life if your only experience is that of suffering?
3. **Rest (vv.** 7a, 10). God will give rest to the saved. The saints receive their rest when the Lord returns in the air and catches us up to be with Him. The word rest means "relief, release, not under pressure." It is the opposite of "tribulation." The word describes the releasing of a bowstring. In this life, God's people are pressured and under the burdens of persecution. But when we see Christ, we will be released! We need not fear fiery wrath and judgment, for God has already judged our sins at Calvary.

Why are believers tempted to believe suffering means God doesn't care? How is suffering evidence of God's work in us? How does the way we act in times of trial prove to others that God is at work?

ASK: What does it mean to "live for eternity"?

As Christians, we must live for eternity and not just for the present. In fact, living "with eternity's values in view" is what makes our Christian life meaningful today. We walk by faith and not by sight.

Paul described the future for unbelievers in vivid and dramatic terms (tribulation, flaming fire, punishment). How might the young church have responded to hearing this? Is fear a reasonable motivator to turn people toward faith? Explain.

What kind of future is there for the lost (2 Thess. 1:9)? For the saved (Rev. 22:4)? What does the phrase *everlasting destruction* mean? (See Matt. 25:41).

What kind of future does the unbeliever face? Look at the dramatic words Paul used to describe it: tribulation, vengeance, flaming fire, punishment, and everlasting destruction. The Christ-rejecting world will receive from God exactly what it gave to God's people! When God repays, He pays in kind, for there is a law of compensation that operates in human history.

It is a *righteous* thing for God to judge sin and condemn sinners. A holy God cannot leave sin unjudged. People who say, "I cannot believe that a loving God would judge sinners and send people to hell" understand neither the holiness of God nor the awfulness of sin. In God's holiness, He *must* deal with sin.

The word *vengeance* must not be confused with *revenge*. The purpose of vengeance is to satisfy God's holy law; the purpose of revenge is to pacify a personal grudge. God does not hold a grudge against lost sinners. Quite the contrary, He sent His Son to die for them, and He pleads with them to return to Him. But if sinners prefer to not know God or obey Him, then there is nothing left for God to do but judge them.

GROUP DISCUSSION: Gather with 3-4 or around your table to discuss the following.

- Describe a time you struggled in your faith because you were suffering. How did you get through that season? How did your faith weaken or grow in the midst of that time?
- What are the circumstances in life that test your faith most? What are some practical ways you persevere in your faith?
- What are some positive motivations to seek a relationship with God (in contrast to the "fire insurance" approach that brings some to Christ)?

GOING FORWARD

One day there really will be no rest (or peace) for the wicked but those who have put their faith in Jesus will know *true* rest. We will be released from the pressures of this life. While we wait for that day we have work to do – share the Gospel with the lost and encourage the faithful. Who needs to hear about the saving hope and rest they can find in Jesus? Who is a believer that is facing a trial right now? How can you bring encouragement and hope?

Wiersbe, Warren. *Be Ready: Living in Light of Christ's Return.* David C. Cook, ©1979
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