

# In Times of Difficulty, our Eyes must be upon Jesus.

9.20.2020

Message 2

Thessalonians

## 1 Thessalonians 1:2–10 (CSB)

<sup>2</sup>We always thank God for all of you, making mention of you constantly in our prayers. <sup>3</sup>We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup>because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full assurance. You know how we lived among you for your benefit, <sup>6</sup>and you yourselves became imitators of us and of the Lord when, in spite of severe persecution, you welcomed the message with joy from the Holy Spirit. <sup>7</sup>As a result, you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. <sup>8</sup>For the word of the Lord **rang** out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place that your faith<sup>r</sup> in God has gone out. Therefore, we don't need to say anything, <sup>9</sup>for they themselves report what kind of reception we had from you: how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God <sup>10</sup>and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Introduction: The Church of Thessalonica is not having an easy time.

A. Every New Testament Church experienced opposition and persecution.

1. Sometimes that persecution was from the local Greeks and Romans.
2. Other times persecution was from the Jews who saw the new Christians as heretics of Judaism.

3. Often, persecution came from both places.
4. I have heard many preachers and Christians over the years say that they wanted a New Testament church in America.
5. If so, let me remind you that **the New Testament church was both spiritually powerful and physically persecuted.**

B. Yet, the church in Thessalonica was thriving.

1. She was witnessing to people as they traveled the Egnatian Way, a highway which led East and West from Rome to Byzantium and across the major cities of the Empire.
2. The Church in Thessalonica used her strategic position in the middle of this major roadway to spread the Gospel.
3. The Apostle Paul was hearing great reports everywhere he went.
4. This is the meaning of verses 7-8.

<sup>7</sup>As a result, you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. <sup>8</sup>For the word of the Lord **rang** out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place that your faith in God has gone out.

C. I want to commend this congregation today for living and witnessing well.

1. 10 years ago, the people of our communities did not know there was an A/G church here.
2. But through you and I, people are hearing about Jesus and what He is doing.
3. And many of the people who are talking about this church don't attend here.
4. That's what I'm proud of, Jesus glorified in us and through us!

D. **The Thessalonians made 2 conscious choices that led to their great witness.**

1. First they turned away from serving idols to serving God.
2. Second, they anticipated the Second Coming of Jesus.

Today, these two choices or behaviors will be the focus and points for our message.

## 1. Turn away from idols to serving the living true God.

A. Thessalonica, like most ancient cities, had plenty of shrines and idols.

1. Many in the city worshipped the god Dionysus (which will become important later).
2. More than likely, ever one of them had come from a background that exalted and worshipped an idol.

B. But when they heard the Word about the One, True, Living God, they accepted Him with joy.

1. To accept God is to embrace Him alone.
2. In a culture that was polytheistic, the worship of One God was a big deal.
3. Yet, these saints embraced God with a passion and intensity that set their region on fire.

C. When affection is divided, so is the power and efficacy.

1. All of us profess to worship only One God.
2. Yet, our affections are divided!
  - a. Rarely can we say that Jesus is our only desire.
  - b. Rarely can we say that our intention and devotion is to God alone.
3. Instead, we are more like the Peter walking on the water.
  - a. We start off with Jesus as the focus of our attention.
  - b. But quickly our eyes wander to the storm and our attention is divided.

4. The only way you and I are going to endure the storm before us is if we set our eyes firmly upon Jesus.

5. "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full into His wonderful face. Then the things of earth, will grow strangely dim! In the light of His Glory and Grace.

D. Let us ask ourselves, "What or who are you worshipping?"

1. Often our priorities become our idols.

a. Your kids or your spouse are a priority.

b. But they must not be your idol.

2. Our jobs are priorities because through them God provides for us.

a. However, our jobs or careers can quickly become an idol.

b. An idol, or false god, always demands from you what Jesus has claimed for himself.

3. Whatever your chosen idol of choice was before salvation, let me remind you that God is jealous for your attention.

4. Let not earthly pursuits draw you away from God.

E. The Church in Thessalonica was commended for her devotion to the One, True God.

1. When Jesus returns, He is coming for a Church that is devoted to Him.

2. Before we address our second point, let us pause a moment to pray and ask God to reveal our hearts and devotions in this moment!

## 2. The Thessalonians watched for Jesus' Second coming.

<sup>9</sup>for they themselves report what kind of reception we had from you: how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God <sup>10</sup>and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

A. Jesus' Second Coming is one of the most important teachings in the Bible.

1. Jesus' first coming was in the immaculate conception and birth.
2. Jesus' second coming will be at the end of this age.
3. The Resurrection and the Second Coming are two parts of the same promise.
  - a. Without the Resurrection, the Second Coming has no purpose
  - b. Without the Second Coming, the Resurrection had no power.

B. The Greek for Second Coming is *parousia*.

1. In the New Testament, this word is used to describe Jesus' return at the end of time as we know it now.
2. But, remember last week how the early church used a familiar term, *ekklesia*, to refer to their meetings together?
3. Well, they did the same thing with the phrase *parousia*.
4. Let me "nerd you out" a little bit with the background of this, and then connect it to our passage (a full article is attached to my notes and are posted online for you to research if you wish).

The term *parousia* is rich in Hellenistic usage. Primarily, "the word served as a sacred expression for the coming of a hidden divinity, who makes his presence felt by a revelation of his power, or whose presence is celebrated in the cult." Significantly, there was a cult of Dionysus in Thessalonica and elsewhere in the Roman world, who was known as "the god that comes," a god of epiphany. His coming was known as a *parousia* in the centuries before the church and after it

(Diodorus Siculus 3.65.1, first century BC; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.80,203; 9.55, first century AD; Aelius Aristides 48.30, 31, second century AD). The *parousia* was used, for example, of Dionysus's *parousia* on earth—*he tou theou parousia* (ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ παρουσία; Diodorus Siculus 3.65.1). When the Thessalonians heard about the *parousia* of Jesus, the Thessalonians would have immediately connected it to their understanding of Dionysus' coming.

C. The Thessalonians were familiar with the idea of a god returning.

1. Remember, they had previously worshipped gods and there were followers of Dionysus in their city.
2. They all had family, friends, and neighbors that worshipped the "so called god of epiphany".
3. But the worship of this false god was a lie.
4. There was no chance that this god would ever come or return.

D. On the other hand, Jesus WAS coming back again.

1. Check out this information from Dr. David Jeremiah:<sup>i</sup>
  - a. **1,845 different biblical references to the Second Coming.**
  - b. **17 books of the Old Testament prophecy of it.**
  - c. **23 out of 27 NT books speak of it.**
  - d. **7 out of 10 chapters in the NT.**
  - e. **1 out of every 30 NT verses.**
  - g. **Jesus referred to His return 21 times.**

2. The Second Coming of Jesus is a major, if not THE Major theme.

- a. Everything is interpreted in light of Jesus' Return.
- b. Without Jesus' imminent return, we have no hope, no faith, and no salvation.

3. I love how the First Church took a term that was a complete lie about Dionysus and used it to describe the perfect truth found in Jesus.

### 3. What is the purpose of Jesus' Second Coming?

A. The first coming was to bear sins, the second time is to bring salvation.

Hebrews 9:26–28 (CSB)

<sup>26</sup> Otherwise, he would have had to suffer many times since the foundation of the world. But now he has appeared one time, at the end of the ages, for the removal of sin by the sacrifice of himself. <sup>27</sup> And just as it is appointed for people to die once—and after this, judgment—<sup>28</sup> so also Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, *will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*

1. The Second Coming of Jesus is important for our salvation.
2. For, at the Second Coming, everything prophesied and promised regarding our eternal future will be made complete.
3. Jesus' parousia will be the consummation of our relationship with Jesus.
  - a. What we experience today is the betrothal or a down-payment of the future glory that awaits us.
  - b. At the Day of Jesus' return, we will experience Him at a level unlike anything here on Earth.
4. Jesus will usher in a Kingdom where there will be no more pain, no more tears, no more grieving, no more loss and no more separation from sin.
5. We will experience the fullness of the salvation that Jesus had provided for upon the Cross.

B. The Second Coming will bring judgment.

Jude 14–15 (CSB)

<sup>14</sup> It was about these that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied: "Look! The Lord comes with tens of thousands of his holy ones <sup>15</sup> to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly concerning all the ungodly acts that they have done in an ungodly way,

and concerning all the harsh things ungodly sinners have said against him.”

1. Jude is a super small letter right before Revelation.
2. More than likely, Jude was one of Jesus’ brothers.
3. Jude quotes a book or writing attributed to the ancient Enoch who is said to have prophesied in the days of Genesis that “the Lord comes to execute judgment on all...”

a. Our understanding of the Second Coming must include the judgment of sin.

b. As the pictures of Revelation portray, at Jesus’ return we see the wrath of God poured out upon the Earth and its inhabitants.

c. Just as God poured out His wrath in the days of Noah, but preserved Noah, He will again pour out His wrath on humanity but we will be saved “from the wrath to come” according to 1 Thes. 1:10.

C. **The soon Appearing of Jesus is the believer’s Blessed Hope.**

1. Titus 2:11–14 (CSB)

<sup>11</sup>For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, <sup>12</sup>instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age, <sup>13</sup>**while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.** <sup>14</sup>He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own possession, eager to do good works.

2. All believers must believe in Jesus’ physical and imminent return. (His return is that important).

3. For those of us who believe, we can anticipate a future day when every injustice, every evil thought and action, every dark



deed, every slander, and every pretense will be revealed in light of Jesus' glory and the greatness of our God.

4. For truly, vengeance belongs to the realm of God and, in that day, every evil thing will be judged according to the light of His glorious appearing.

4. Therefore, you and I should live in the light of God's future appearance.

A. Are you ready for Jesus' return?

1. Have you repented of your sin?
2. Have you told your family and friends about these beliefs?
3. What are we doing while we anticipate the Second Coming of Jesus?

B. I'm afraid that many of us don't believe in a real heaven or a real hell anymore.

1. I've heard it said that, at a funeral, every person is a Universalist, meaning that everyone goes to heaven.
2. But I can assure you, that I have officiated services where I speak not of the person's eternity, for I had no proof that they were in the Presence of Jesus.
3. The Second Coming was constantly on the mind of the believers in Thessalonica.
4. They had captured a glimpse of the reality of eternity that you and I have forgotten.
5. We have lost sight of the seriousness that Jesus' return possesses.

C. Jesus' Words in Matthew 24 remind us of the heaviness of that day.

Matthew 24:27-42 (CSB)

<sup>27</sup> For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup> Wherever the carcass is, there the vultures will gather.

#### THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN

<sup>29</sup> "Immediately after the distress of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shed its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>30</sup> **Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the peoples of the earth will mourn; and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.** <sup>31</sup> **He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.**

#### THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE

<sup>32</sup> "Learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>33</sup> In the same way, when you see all these things, recognize that he is near—at the door. <sup>34</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place. <sup>35</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

#### NO ONE KNOWS THE DAY OR HOUR

<sup>36</sup> "Now concerning that day and hour no one knows—neither the angels of heaven nor the Son—except the Father alone. <sup>37</sup> As the days of Noah were, so the coming of the Son of Man will be. <sup>38</sup> For in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah boarded the ark. <sup>39</sup> They didn't know until the flood came and swept them all away. This is the way the coming of the Son of Man will be. <sup>40</sup> Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding grain with a hand mill; one will be taken and one left. <sup>42</sup> Therefore be alert, since you don't know what day your Lord is coming.

Closing: Let us ready ourselves for Jesus' Return.

A. There is much I don't yet understand about the End-Times.

1. I do know that although we are not in the Tribulation but we are in the Last Days.

2. And the world needs to know that there is no amount of stockpiling that can assure our safety through the wrath of God.

3. Jesus is the only way to escape the coming wrath.

B. This morning, let us let meditate upon Jesus' Second Coming.

1. Is this good news to you or bad?

2. What "business" is being revealed to you that is undone?

3. Is your family ready?

4. Are you ready?

C. Let us Ready ourselves for Jesus' imminent Return this morning.

## “The Second Return of Jesus Christ!”

Notes and Scripture from Pastor Jerry Heath, Endurance Church, West Plains MO

**I Thessalonians 1:9-10** – “...and to wait for His Son from Heaven...”

- **Hebrews 9:28** – “...He will return a Second time...”
- **I Thessalonians 2:19 / I Thessalonians 3:13 / I Thessalonians 4:15-18 / I Thessalonians 5:2 & 23 / 2 Thessalonians 1:7 & 10 / 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 & 8**
- That is just the books of 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians!

### **1. God’s Word says that Jesus is Coming back a Second time!**

- **I John 3:2** – “When he appears...”
- **Acts 1:9-11** – “This same Jesus will come back in the same way He left” (On the clouds)
- **I Peter 5:4** – “When the Chief Shepherd appears...”
- **2 Peter 3:1-10** – “But the Day of the Lord will come...”

### **2. Jesus himself said that He would come back a Second time!**

- **Matthew 24:3** – **The Question** – “...and what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?”
- **Matthew 24:27, 30, 37, 42, 44, 46 & 50** – Jesus will return a Second time!
- **Matthew 26:63-64**
- **John 14:1-3** – “I will come again and take you to be with Me...”

### **3. Jesus will return a Second time to stop all evil and be the Judge!**

- **2 Corinthians 5:10** – Jesus is the Judge!
- **Matthew 16:27** – Crystal clear!
- **Jude 1:14-15** – Enoch prophesied this all the way back in Genesis!
- **Romans 8:19-22** – Creation itself is waiting for Jesus to return a Second time!
- **2 Thessalonians 1:6-12** – The Judgment at Christ’s Second return!
- **Revelation 19:11-16 / Revelation 20:11-15** – Jesus the Judge!

### **4. God has promised the nation of Israel that Jesus will return a Second time!**

- **Zechariah 14:4-5, 10-12** – Jerusalem will be the Head Quarters of Christ’s Kingdom!

### **5. Jesus will return a Second time to end Satan’s rule!**

- **John 17:5 & I John 5:19** – The Evil One!
- **2 Corinthians 4:4** – “the god of this age...”
- **Ephesians 2:2** – “Ruler of the kingdom of the air”

### **A. Who is the only One who can defeat the Evil One? **Jesus!****

- **Revelation 5:1-5 / verses 9-10 & 12-13 / John 1:29** – The Lamb of God who sacrificed His life for all sin!

- How interesting that the Apostle John begins to weep in **verse 4!** **Why?** Because if there is no one worthy or powerful enough to open the scroll, then no one can defeat all of the evil and its ruler!
- **Verse 5** – Jesus is able!!!!!!!

**Closing: Matthew 24:3** – “**End of the age**” = **the Final Chapter!**

- **Coming** = Greek “Parousia” = to be present = the sign of your **full presence** at the **Final Chapter of the end of the age.**
- This is used **5 x’s** in Matthew 24! (This is **NOT** talking about 70 AD / Destruction of Jerusalem!)
- **Revelation 3:11** & **Revelation 22:7**

## Commentary notes on parousia.

Bible Word Study: παρουσία (*parousia*)

The term *parousia* is rich in Hellenistic usage. Primarily, “the word served as a sacred expression for the coming of a hidden divinity, who makes his presence felt by a revelation of his power, or whose presence is celebrated in the cult.” Significantly, there was a cult of Dionysus in Thessalonica and elsewhere in the Roman world, who was known as “the god that comes,” a god of epiphany. His coming was known as a *parousia* in the centuries before the church and after it (Diodorus Siculus 3.65.1, first century BC; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.80,203; 9.55, first century AD; Aelius Aristides 48.30, 31, second century AD). The *parousia* was used, for example, of Dionysus’s *parousia* on earth—*he tou theou parousia* (ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ παρουσία; Diodorus Siculus 3.65.1). When the Thessalonians heard about the *parousia* of Jesus, the Thessalonians would have immediately connected it to their understanding of Dionysus’ coming.

The term *parousia*, as making its first appearance in the early letters to the Thessalonians, caught on in the early churches. In short, the spatial position of Thessalonica (as a gateway to the east and west) promoted the spreading of the term as code for Jesus’ second coming. Its presence in writings that are later **p 588** than the letters to the Thessalonians affirms this. The term was used by James (5:7–8), Peter (2 Peter 1:16; 3:4, 12), Matthew (24:3, 27, 37, 39—Jesus’ discourse on the end-times would have been earlier than the writing of Matthew’s Gospel), and John (1 John 2:28). In all of these writings, which are usually dated by scholars *after* 1–2 Thessalonians, the *parousia* signifies Jesus coming to earth at the end of this age.

The term *parousia* also “became the official term for a visit of a person of high rank, especially of kings and emperors visiting a province.” The word was used “from Ptolemaic times onwards to denote the visit of a king, emperor, or other person in authority.”<sup>16</sup> For example, P. Paris 26.1, 18 speaks of the visitation (*parousia*) of King Ptolemy Philometor and Cleopatra to Memphis (163/162 BC). Other literature of that period indicates that *parousia* was used of this kind of visitation. The Thessalonians would have understood the second definition of *parousia*, either by the context of Paul and Silas’ letters to them or by way of Jesus’ use of the term in apocalyptic

context (as recorded in Matt 24), which then became a part of oral tradition, spoken to them by Silas, one of Jesus' early disciples. Jesus' usage of the word would have spread among the early churches, especially to and from Thessalonica, which was a gateway (on the Egnatian Way) between the eastern churches and western churches.

Connected to the term *parousia* is the Greek expression *apantesis* mentioned above, which refers to the custom of sending an official delegation out of the city to meet a visiting dignitary. Earlier in their history, some Thessalonians had gone out to meet Octavian after his military victory at Philippi (as noted earlier). They would go out to accompany the dignitary and return with him to the city. For p 589 example, the word in the New Testament was used of the Christian brothers who came out to meet Paul on his way to Rome (they met him at the Forum of Appius) and then accompany him back to Rome (Acts 28:15–16). The implication is that the risen and raptured Christians will leave earth and go to meet the Lord Jesus in the air and then return with him to earth.<sup>1</sup>

## Notes from Dr. Jeremiah

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<sup>i</sup> <https://davidjeremiah.blog/the-second-coming-of-christ/>

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<sup>1</sup> Philip W. Comfort, "[The Social and Geographical World of Thessalonica \(1 Thessalonians 1:1, 9; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; Acts 17:1-9\)](#)," in *Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation*, ed. Barry J. Beitzel, Jessica Parks, and Doug Mangum, Lexham Geographic Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 587–589.