All Things in Light of Eternity

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. We are continuing today in 2 Thessalonians.

! We began this study last week looking at verses 1-4 and today we'll pick up in verse 5. There are a lot of examples in life that we are familiar with where you persevere in a difficult task because you are aware of how joyful the end will be.
You think about that with a football player. They go through the rigors of summer conditioning and summer weightlifting and practice when it's super hot and miserable and they do that because they know that at the end if they are successful, the joy of hoisting the trophy at the end of the season is so exciting to them, it makes all the pain and difficulty worth it.
If you've been watching basketball the last couple of days on March Madness, which by the way, I don't want to brag, I fill out a bracket on ESPN and I'm told today I'm in the top 14 million, which means there's 14 million people ahead of me, but then I'm right there.
So it's actually 14,700,000, but I'm within striking distance. And you watch all these players going through all this work and all this sacrifice all year long.
[1:45] And why do you do that? Well, you do that because of the joy of winning at the end. Or maybe just more personally, if you're wanting to get healthier and maybe you've gone to the doctor and recognize that your eating habits aren't what they should be and so you start to deny yourself some food that you love, but because you want to be healthier, you start eating more healthy things and you exercise and you think this isn't as much fun as it used to be.

Why are we doing this? And you do it because of the goal that awaits. Or seasonally. A lot of us, most of us, not all of us, but most of us love decorating for Christmas and getting all of the trees out, the lights out, the decorations out.
And admittedly, it's a lot of work to do that. You've got to climb up and down the stairs and the attic and you've got to haul things down and lights are broken and lights are tangled and nothing works and it takes forever and it's just up for a few weeks anyway.
Why do you go through all of that hassle? Because of the joy of your home when it's decorated and how beautiful and peaceful and tranquil it is. There's a lot of things in life that are hard, but we go through it because we know at the end of that is a reward of some kind.
A delight of some kind that makes the hassle and the difficulty and the struggle worth it. Well, a similar thing is true in our spiritual life.
[3:30] Admittedly, this is a hard world. And living for Christ in this world is challenging. And choosing to live in such a way that you would deny the flesh, that you would forgive someone who's hurt you, that you would not return evil for evil, but instead would seek to be kind, that you would live your life to be generous, not just to take for yourself.

Now, all of these things that the Bible calls us to do, admittedly are not easy to do. But we do that because of the goal of what awaits us.
There are a lot of things in our Christian walk that are very difficult to endure. And the challenge that awaits us and the sacrifice that awaits us can be quite costly.
But we do that because of the end. We want to glorify Christ. We want our lives to count for the sake of the kingdom.
We want to live our lives in such a way that all sacrifice is worth it to hear the Lord say to us, well done, good and faithful servant.
[4:59] And that brings us to where we are in 2 Thessalonians, picking up in verse 5. He's going to begin this section here that deals with some eschatology, the study of the last days.

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We had a lot of that in 1 Thessalonians that we looked at last semester on Sunday nights. You see it again here in 2 Thessalonians. And by the way, just be reminded of this.
In the Scripture, the heart behind eschatology, the study of the last days, the heart behind that is not ammunition for debate.
It is to encourage the heart. You see that repeatedly, particularly in 1 Thessalonians, where in chapter 4 and chapter 5, Paul writes to encourage each other or to comfort each other with these words, words about the end times.
That when we read about the coming of the Lord and the things associated with the end times, this is not first and foremost about argumentation. This is about comforting God's people.
[6:11] And the truth is that for those who are believers, we ought to be eagerly anticipating the return of the Lord.

In fact, it's one of the motivations for why we endure suffering and hardship in this life because of the joy that awaits us when Christ returns.
2 Thessalonians 1, verse 5 says, This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are also suffering.
Since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.
They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might. When He comes on that day to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at among all who have believed because our testimony to you was believed.
[7:43] I want you to make note first this morning that our suffering has a cleansing effect. Our suffering has a cleansing effect.

We're talking about in this section here how we are to live and do all things in light of eternity. We don't make decisions of how we're going to live today based simply on what's the easiest or most convenient thing to do.
We live today in light of the end. We sacrifice, we suffer, in light of the joy that comes at the end. Like the athlete training for the prize, we endure suffering today for the delight of what awaits us.
And while we are living that way, we embrace this first truth that our suffering has a cleansing effect. Look again at verse 5.
[8:44] This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are also suffering.

Remember the context. Paul goes to Thessalonica, helps begin the church. He's driven out of the city. He sends Timothy back to check on the church.
He gets a good report from Timothy. He writes 1 Thessalonians. He then a few months later gets another report from the church and he writes 2 Thessalonians.
This is a young church that has some things that have to be addressed. He's going to address some things and correct some things. But this is a young church that's growing in their faith. He's grateful for them.
And he writes to express his gratitude and to encourage them and to motivate them. And part of their problem is they're facing persecution. As we mentioned last week, they're facing persecution from Gentiles.
[9:43] They're facing persecution from the Jewish population there and facing persecution from false teachers who are trying to creep in. They're getting hit on all sides.

But their suffering has a cleansing effect. Now this is important for you to understand because this tells us that we should never conclude that suffering means we're out of God's will.
Sometimes you do the right thing and you still suffer. Sometimes you're faithful and things still unravel.
Sometimes you're honest and you still get opposition. But God is using our suffering to refine us and to shape us into His image.
Sometimes you'll hear false teachers say certain things like, you know, the Lord always wants you to be healthy and wealthy and on top of the world or if you're suffering, it's because you don't have enough faith or you're just not doing what God's will is.

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[11:00] But that kind of nonsense doesn't hold up in any capacity. I mean, all you have to do is have a cursory reading of the New Testament to see that's absolute foolishness.

There is suffering for the people of God. In fact, much of Scripture is written to motivate us to endure in suffering for the sake of the joy that is to come.
And our great example of that is Christ Himself according to the book of Hebrews, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross.
Christ is our ultimate example of what it means to endure suffering because of the joy of what is to come. And so you may be suffering in your life today.
Don't conclude from that that God is against you or that God has forsaken you or that this is evidence that you're not living right.
[12:08] Our suffering has a cleansing effect on us. God's righteous judgment, verse 5, is evident, it says.

It means we trust His judgment in all things. But whether it's trusting the Lord to get us through the suffering, trusting the Lord to refine us in the suffering, or trusting the Lord to make all things right at the end of all things, we trust Him.
And I do want you to notice here in context, the specific suffering mentioned here is suffering for the kingdom of God. Look again at verse 5. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are suffering.
When the Bible holds up the blessing we have as Christians even to suffer for the kingdom, let me just remind you biblically in context, we're talking about suffering for the sake of the kingdom.
Meaning, if you suffer consequences because you've lived in rebellion, that's to our shame not to our honor.
[13:28] If you're going 65 in a school zone and you get a massive ticket, you're not suffering for the kingdom. You disobeyed the law and you're getting justice.

If you stole from your company and got fired, you're not being persecuted. You're receiving the just results of your sin.
Let's be careful with that because sometimes people live in sinful rebellion and when they face the consequences of their sin, they want to talk about how they're suffering for Jesus and being persecuted.
That's not what we're talking about in context here. We're talking about people who are standing up for the gospel, being public with their faith, refusing to deny the Lord and because of their stance and their belief of Christ and His word, they suffer opposition.
Now some of you, even in this church, you've suffered opposition because of this. In your job, many of you with your own families, because of your clear stance on the gospel and your belief in His word, people in your families have turned against you and as hard as that is, just know there is great joy that awaits in the end even for the worst of persecution or opposition or suffering you've had to endure.
[15:07] We see this in John 9. You're familiar with the man born blind? John 9, 1-3 says, as he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth and his disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?

Jesus answered, it was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. Jesus is not saying here that the man's parents are sinless or the man is sinless. What He's saying is the reason for his suffering is not a punishment for some specific sin. This is all an opportunity to display the power and the work of God.
And when you suffer, and you suffer with faith and trust, the work of God is made manifest in your life.
And as that happens, it has a cleansing effect. It refines us. When you don't understand why you're suffering the way you are, and that may be opposition from family because of your faith, that may be physical suffering you're going through, could be any number of things, but there's times where you try as hard as you can to understand, God, why am I going through this?
[16:34] God, why is this pain unrelenting? And when we suffer that way, just know this, that the Lord is cleansing you, refining you, strengthening you, helping you.

And that doesn't mean that it's easy. It means that because you know what's to come on the other side, the joy that awaits is worth it.

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Ephesians 1.11 says, in Him we have obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.
The ultimate answer to the question of why is Ephesians 1.11. That this is according to the counsel of His will.
Now that's not going to take away every question you have, but it does provide you a biblical theological rock on which to build your life that is God's people.
[17:51] One of the comforts you have is knowing whatever you're facing has come to you through the hands of a sovereign God who is always working all things to the counsel of His will.

and even when that results in suffering for you, painful as it may be, it has a cleansing effect on us. How so?
Well, when we suffer, it causes us to think of things that will last forever. It's so easy for us to get wrapped up in things that are just here and now, but when you're really suffering, suffering.
And by the way, when I say really suffering, you don't need to compare yourself against somebody else that's had some tragic things because whatever you're going through today is real for you.
But whatever pain you're facing today, whatever hardship is a part of your life, that's real for you.
And yes, maybe somebody else has had it harder and yes, maybe somebody else has had more suffering than you, but for you, this is real.
[19:05] This is a real test. This is a real challenge for you. It counts. And when you go through that, it has a way of stripping away from us things that don't matter much.

That's a helpful thing. Suffering brings humility to us because it reminds us of how dependent we are upon the Lord.
And that's a good thing. As far as I know, I'm healthy, don't have any issues that I know of, able to do on a daily basis things that I want to do.
but a week ago, because of a toothache that would not go away, my wife calls the dentist and they get me in and I end up going through about three hours of a totally unplanned procedure.
And there were parts in those three hours that was about as painful as anything I've been through.
And in that moment, I couldn't do anything.
[20:23] That pain went away. The next week comes, I'm able to do anything I want to do. I have to go back to the doctor this past week to have it finished up.

I thought this was a short thing. It was another about two, two and a half hours. And by the end of the two weeks, within about seven days, I've been there for like six hours of stuff that was far more invasive and far more intense and far more painful than I ever imagined.
And while I'm there, it occurs to me, I'm the smallest problem away from being completely incapacitated. I mean, I can be healthy in one minute and the next minute, I can't do anything.
And when I've, when they're hitting this nerve in my jaw that is about to send me through the roof, I don't care what the Dow Jones is, I don't care what my 401k looks like, I don't care what interest rates are, I don't care what gas prices are, all these things that can kind of consume your life at times.
The only thing I care about is am I going to live through this and if I'm not, let's get there now. Well, it's kind of a humbling thing to realize that just the smallest thing, just the smallest thing can put you on your back.
[21:49] well, there's some cleansing effect that comes from that. We don't need to live in fear, but we need to realize that our strength and our resources and our jobs, our careers, all of that can be gone in a moment's notice.

and when you suffer and when persecution comes into your life, there's a cleansing effect it has. It cleanses us also because it propels us to run to Christ and to cling to His comfort above all else.
and reminds us of how fleeting the things of this world really are. But I think the sweetest cleansing effect that comes from suffering is that when you go through suffering and your heart and your mind's first thought is how can I glorify Christ?
I want to honor the Lord in this. It provides the strongest, clearest assurance of your salvation.
If somebody says, you know, who wants everything their way? Who wants to be healthy and who wants to be happy and who wants to be joyful and who wants everything to be good?
[23:24] Well, everyone's going to raise their hand to that. That doesn't take any spiritual transformation. Everybody wants that. But if you say, who's willing to take up their cross, deny themselves, and follow Jesus?

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Who's willing to suffer for the sake of the joy that's to come later? If you say, who's willing to live for the glory of Christ no matter what it brings?
Now you're talking about what can only happen as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. One of the cleansing effects of suffering in our life is that when we go through that suffering with the love of Christ, a desire to honor Christ, it brings us assurance of our salvation that is the sweetest reward you can have.
Suffering has a cleansing effect. Notice, secondly, that God's judgment will have a condemning effect.
God's judgment will have a condemning effect. Verse 6, since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you.
[24:57] Now, there's a very important truth you need to grasp here. Those who oppose God's people are going to have to deal with Him. Those who oppose the gospel, those who mock Christians, those who persecute the church, they're going to have to deal with the Lord.

And those who oppose the Lord and oppose His people will have no hope unless they repent. Meeting the Lord for the unbeliever will bring nothing but condemnation.
Listen to Romans 1, verse 18 and following. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.
For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them for His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made, so they are without excuse.
Those who reject Christ, reject the gospel, oppose His church, will stand guilty before the Lord without excuse.
[26:23] So you may suffer, verse 5, but verse 6, God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you.

Verse 7, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us. Notice two things here that happens as Christ returns.
He will repay and He will relieve. He will repay the rebel and He will relieve the faithful.
The suffering for God's people has a time limit. It won't go on forever. There's an end.
And knowing that it won't go on forever is what helps you to endure. I mean, in a very small way, just because I know I'm preaching this text a couple of days ago at the dentist, so I'm going through this deal.
[27:29] I'm thinking to myself, as painful as this is, I know this won't last. I don't know how long it's going to last, but it won't last forever. Like, if we get to the end of the day, and I'm still here, something's gone wrong.

This isn't going to last forever. Incidentally, they've got this little TV that you can, while you're laying down and praying to the Lord, you can watch TV. And so I went on YouTube and put on a playlist of the songs, most of the songs that we sing here at church.
And I've got a friend of mine who a lot of the music that we sing here are songs that he's been a part of writing. And there's a song, one of my favorite songs, it's called Almost Home. Don't drop a single anchor, we're almost home.
It's just talking about the Christian life, and don't get too tired of the world because heaven is our home. And I was listening to that at the most intense part of the pain, thinking, I may be going to heaven soon.
If I am, I'm going to endure until I get there. I text him and said, hey, you're helping me get through this. Your song about heaven is getting me through this very painful day. But the reality is I knew in that moment the pain I felt wasn't going to last forever.
[28:40] When you have surgery, you know it's not going to last forever. You get the flu, you feel really sick, you feel miserable, but it's not going to last forever.

When you're going through a hard conditioning workout in preseason, it's not going to last forever. forever. We know that. And knowing that there's an end to the suffering, an end to the pain, because of what comes on the other side is what helps us get through it.
And Paul's saying that very same thing is how we as God's people deal with suffering today. The Lord's going to return, and when He returns, the rebels are going to be dealt with.
So if you ever wondered, why doesn't God deal with all this sin and all this wickedness, hang on, He will. And when He returns, He repays the rebel, and He relieves the faithful, and the suffering, and

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the persecution, and the struggles of this life come to an end.
We see this in 2 Corinthians 4. So we do not lose heart, though the outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.
[30:16] You say, now wait a minute, how does the Bible call my worst days light and momentary? Now let's be honest. If you've been through the death of a spouse, or the loss of a child, or the ending of a marriage, or you've lost your job out of the blue, or you've received a diagnosis that scared you to death, nothing about that feels light, and nothing about that feels momentary.

It feels heavy as can be, and feels like a cloud you cannot get out from under. And yet, 2 Corinthians 4 says, our affliction in this life, our pain in this life, is light and momentary.
And there may be some of you here, you hear that verse, and you say, if you knew what I was going through today, how could you possibly call that light?
Well, here's how. Verse 18. We look not at things that are seen, but things that are unseen. For things that are seen are temporary.
things that are unseen are eternal. In other words, what makes your worst day today light and momentary is when compared to the joy and the glory of heaven.
[32:25] Which means when you get to heaven and you experience all the Lord has in store for you, on that day, you would look back at your worst pain in this life and say, that was so light and so temporary.

When viewed by the comparison of how great and glorious heaven will be. now, some of you hear that and you say, I've been through and I'm going through really hard days.
If this pain is going to feel light and this weight is going to feel momentary, then heaven is going to have to be unbelievably glorious.
That's exactly the point. momentary. The point is not that your suffering isn't real. The point's not that your pain isn't deep.
The point is that you endure it with faith and with love and with hope because what awaits you in the end is so indescribably good that on that day, this day, will feel light and momentary.
[33:59] day. But for those who don't know Christ, they're going to suffer at the hands of the wrath of God.

it's been said that the world is the only heaven the unbeliever will ever know and it's the only hell the believer will ever experience.
In other words, this life is as good as it gets for the unbeliever and this life is as hard as it gets for you because eternity for you as God's child will be all glory.
So we understand that our suffering has a cleansing effect on us and we also know the truth that his appearing will have a condemning effect on those who reject him.
Look at verse 8. When the Lord Jesus revealed from heaven with his mighty angels and flaming fire inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.
[35:17] The Lord himself will pass out vengeance and punishment. You don't have to. Like me, I know you get frustrated when you see examples of the world mocking the church or mocking the things of God or when you see people on TV that are belittling Christians or using the Lord's name in vain.

All these kinds of things rightly angers us and it should. But you don't have to seek retribution for that. The Lord will take care of that. And make no mistake about it.
This world, apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, hates the things of Christ. They'll tolerate singing about his birth, but they will have no toleration for you preaching about his return. Which is interesting to me because it's the same Bible that tells us about his birth, it tells us about his return, and yet for the world, only that one part of his story is palpable.
You can tell them about Christmas in Bethlehem, they're good with that. But the same Bible tells us he's returning, and not just returning, he's returning in vengeance, in judgment. And I want you to understand that while that is a warning to the unbeliever, this is meant to be an encouragement to you as a Christian, you don't have to set all things right.
[36:47] You don't have the pressure on you to make everything fit. When you say, I don't understand why I'm suffering this way, I don't understand why this is allowed to go on in the world, I don't understand why she's getting by with this kind of sin, I don't understand why he can do this

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and there's no ramification, you don't have the pressure on you to make everything in the world on the scales line up.

You just entrust yourself to the Lord who judges rightly. And you let the Lord be your defense. And you let the Lord deal with evil. verse 9 says, they will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from his presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.
This does a couple of things for the Christian. One, it should encourage us to know that our suffering has a purpose and our suffering has a time limit. Two, it frees us up from thinking we've got to seek retribution.
We don't. We trust the Lord. And three, this gives us motivation and urgency in our evangelism because the truth is as great and glorious as heaven will be for the believer, hell and judgment will be equally awful for the unbeliever.
[38:38] As Leon Morris said, to die without Christ is to pass into a night on which no morning dawns. And this is a heavy and sobering text today.

God's people. But it's here to encourage God's people. It's here to help us be faithful in affliction and persistent even in suffering, knowing that even while you suffer, it has a cleansing effect on you.
And you don't have to watch the news and try to figure out how are you going to make all things right. the Lord will take care of that. When he comes again, he will repay the rebel and he will relieve the faithful.
And until that day, we praise, we worship, we serve, we fellowship, we encourage, we press on.
Now, if you're here this morning and you don't know Christ as your Savior, I need you to understand there are two truths at the same time that are equally and forever true.
[40:07] One, those who are covered by his grace when they die will know nothing but eternal glory. Two, those who die apart from his grace will know nothing but eternal judgment.

Both of those are true at the same time. So the most pressing question for every one of us this morning is are we covered by his grace?
The Bible tells us we are all sinners and the wage of our sin is death and that to die without Christ is to be separated from his blessings forever.
Yet, those who call upon his name, those who believe in him, will never perish but have everlasting life.
If you don't know Christ today, it is true, you are one missed heartbeat away from eternal judgment.
[41:22] Here's the good news. Jesus lived a perfect life you could not live, died on a cross that should have been us, and was raised back to life so that all who would believe in his name would not perish.

Salvation belongs to our God and all who believe in his son, the Lord Jesus Christ in faith receive his grace.
You don't have to be scared scared to die, scared to meet the Lord, uneasy about his return. You can live in the assurance and the comfort that you are his child and that when you take your last breath, this earth is the worst you would ever face because heaven is so good that even your worst day on this earth by comparison is light and temporary.
that's what awaits the believer, not because we're so good, but because he's so faithful. So Christian, be encouraged.
If you have to suffer, suffer well. And if you're opposed, endure. And let it cleanse you.
[42:51] Let it drive you to Christ. Christ. And don't get too hung up on all the affairs of the world because the Lord will deal with the wicked.

When he comes, he will repay them for their evil. He will relieve the suffering of his people and will have all eternity to enjoy what he has prepared for those who love him.
Lord, your word is sobering for us and yet it's helpful for us. And we do pray that you would use it even this morning to bring conviction to those who don't know you and to bring comfort to those who do.
We thank you for the cross and for your grace that is greater than our sin. In Jesus' name, amen.
We'll see you tonight at five o'clock.
Love you, church family. God bless you. Thank you so much for joining us via live stream this morning.

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[44:06] If you have any questions whatsoever about our church or the ministries that our church provides, please visit us at fbcmustang.org. We would love to follow up with you and get to know you better.

As always, we try to emphasize if at all possible, if you could be here physically present with us, we would love that and that would be a joy to serve you in that way.
But thank you again for joining us via live stream today. Have a great day. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you. Thank you.

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