2 Thessalonians 1:5 5This is evidence of God’s righteous verdict that resulted in your being counted worthy of God’s kingdom.

I’ll bet that the words I just highlighted for you are words that clearly puzzle you. These words seem to speak of our being worthy, a worthiness that again seems to indicate that we are going to be a part of God’s kingdom. Seriously, if you just take these words and consider nothing else it would appear that you and I need to earn, to somehow be counted as worthy of God’s kingdom.

But here is where learning to read God’s Word in its context is so important. You can’t just pull a sentence out of context and then declare it says this or that. You must take the context, in other words, take what is said before, after and around a text and you will be better able to understand what has been said. Context is so important.

The context of this sentence is verses 1-4. Those verses say this: **“We are always obligated to thank God for you, brothers, as is fitting, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love that each and every one of you has for one another is increasing. So we ourselves boast about you in God’s churches in regard to your patient endurance and faith in all your persecutions and in the trials that you are enduring.”**

There is the context. Now you can understand what the “evidence” is. The evidence is the growing faith and the growing love that the Thessalonian believers had. And in truth, I think that as Paul is writing this letter, he is still overwhelmed and stunned at what was taking place. The truth of the matter is that Paul and his companions only spent about 3 weeks in Thessalonica teaching and preaching Jesus, him crucified and risen as our Lord and Savior from sin. And then the problems arose.

The members of the Jewish synagogue of Thessalonica gathered together and started a riot in the city over this teaching of Jesus and over the fact that this faith was winning converts. So the enemies of Christ started a riot but Paul and his companions were able to hide. Now Jason, whose home the Christians were meeting in and some of the other Christians believers were dragged, literally dragged before the city officials. After they forced Jason and company to post a bond, they were let go and then later on in the night Paul and his companions were able to escape and get to Berea. Yet that wasn’t the end of it. This congregation of Christians left were now persecuted and harassed on a regular basis. And despite all of this, this congregation held together. In fact, not only held together but managed to grow and actually win more converts to Jesus as the Savior. All of this is what Paul calls **“this evidence of God’s righteous verdict.”**

Well if you would, I would like to explore the depths of what this phrase is saying. It is an awesome phrase. It is a hopeful phrase. It is a scary phrase. Yep, all of that in just on little, itty bitty, small phrase. But all of this because it has the power and majesty of the Holy God behind it. Our theme will be: **GOD’S RIGHTEOUS VERDICT.**

We have now heard a great part of the context of this verse. Clearly the verse is speaking to us about the Christian faith, literally about the impact and results of the Christian faith. Follow along with what has been said. This group of believers in Thessalonica are praised for their faith. They are praised for a faith that is growing stronger and stronger in individual hearts. It is seen and understood that this faith they had in Jesus was growing because the love practiced among these believers is quite clear and evident. In other words, as the persecutions were going on, they banded together more and more, helped each other more and more, had compassion and concern for each other more and more, and, I think you understand the point. Because of what they did as Christians, because of the love they shared as Christians that is what is pointed to as evidence of their growing faith.

It is evidence because of the persecutions going on. When all is well, when all is going gung ho and awesome it might be a bit harder to see our Christian faith and love in action. But add persecution. Add the fact that caring for your fellow Christians, standing up for them, defending them, and putting yourself out there as a fellow Christian while Christians are being persecuted, that is clearly God’s love in action. A fearless love. A love that evidently knows something so wonderful that you would literally jeopardize your life and your well-being for the sake of the believers around you.

Why would you do that? Notice what our text actually points to. It is a wonderful sentence. Our text said, **“This is evidence of God’s righteous verdict that resulted in your being counted worthy of God’s kingdom.”** The important thing here is the verb “counted worthy.” It is an aorist passive verb. The aorist denotes a completed action and the passive voice denotes it is something done to you rather than something you have done. Personally I would prefer the translation: **“being declared worthy”** which I think highlights the passive voice more clearly. Either way, what you and I have to grasp is that God’s righteous verdict brought about the result of the people being declared worthy of God’s kingdom. Please note that very clearly. God’s righteous verdict is what causes the declaration of worthiness. It is not what they are doing or how they are living or the fact that they are being brave and hopeful and so forth. The declaration of worthiness is only caused by God’s righteous verdict!

So what is “God’s righteous verdict or judgment?” We have heard it a few times in the past Sunday’s as you heard the readings that declared: **“the righteous will live by faith.”** The Jewish people saw this truth time and time again as they brought their sacrifices to the temple and those sacrifices with their shed blood and their burning up pointed them to the work of the Messiah to come. The Thessalonians especially learned this truth as they heard of Jesus, the Son of God, who gave his life on the cross, suffered eternal hell and the wrath of God for all sin, rose from the dead and then declared that forgiveness of sins and eternal life be preached in his name. God’s righteous verdict is that His Son would pay for sin. God’s holy will, his divine purpose for all of mankind is that He would of his love, overlook our wickedness and forgive our sins just because of Jesus.

Dear people, this has always been God’s declaration. In the Old Testament through the ceremonial laws God showed that forgiveness would be because of the Lamb of God that would take away the sin of the world. God displayed this truth to us as Jesus went to the cross and cried out for our benefit both: **“My God, my God why have you forsaken me!”** and **“It is finished.”** The work of redemption was done. God because of Jesus, clothes us with Jesus’ righteousness. We have the gift of eternal life and salvation because God forgives all our sins in Jesus. That is God’s righteous verdict. That God would take care of all things necessary that we become his children and heirs of eternal life. Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior from sin! You are counted / declared worthy by faith in Jesus, and that is the gift of God’s grace too!

Now what I find curious and marvelous is the next declaration of these words. These next words are given I think for the comfort of the believers who are suffering and to remind all that Jesus is the one everyone is going to have to answer to. Because here are our next words: **“Certainly, it is right for God to repay trouble to those who trouble you, 7and to give relief to you, who are troubled along with us. When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his powerful angels, 8he will exercise vengeance in flaming fire on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9Such people will receive a just penalty: eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from his glorious strength, 10on that day when he comes to be glorified among his saints, and to be marveled at among all those who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.”**

What absolutely powerful words! You do realize these words declare to other “verdict” or “judgment” that God has declared! The Holy Spirit has moved his apostle to remind these people, people under persecution and hardship, not to worry about what was going on but rather to focus on Jesus and his marvel for them. They are believers. They will one day rejoice and simply marvel at the majesty, glory, honor, power and complete justice of Jesus. But at the same time note the very clear message that is given. There will be eternal consequences for those who reject Jesus.

Look at those phrases: **“It is right for God to repay trouble to those who trouble you.”** Your persecutors will not escape the wickedness of their hatred for Jesus and you. Or, **“he will exercise vengeance in flaming fire on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”** God is a just and righteous God. He will judge wickedness and sin with his full fury and anger. And no wonder. Jesus came and went to hell for every soul, paid for every sin for every human to ever live. When you as a human declare by your actions your unbelief and your rejection of God’s Son, that you don’t care, that you reject this sacrifice on your behalf, well, God literally says, you can have the flaming fire back. I offered you my love and forgiveness and you demand my justice and damnation!

Now just so we are clear, the phrase, **“obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus,”** is not speaking about doing this or that or living this way or that way or anything else that has to do with the works of the law. That phrase speaks of faith. Obeying the gospel is to have faith in Jesus. To know and believe that because of Jesus you inherit eternal life and salvation. 1 John 3:23 is a great passage for this truth. It says, **“This then is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and that we love one another just as he commanded us.”** That passage is so fitting here. Just think of how the strong faith of the Thessalonians was displayed in their love for each other. It is always about Jesus and Him as our Savior. That’s what it is to “obey” the gospel. That word “obey” is used more in the sense of “believe” than anything else.

And there is more that God says. **“Such people will receive a just penalty: eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from his glorious strength.”** The “such people” are those who reject Jesus as Lord and Savior. And note the God says point blank that the penalty is just, it is completely right and perfect. God makes no mistakes. God is always holy and righteous in all that he does. I like this verse because it reminds us that we are not the ones who determine what is good and right, but rather God does. And how so many can ignore these clear and revealing words of God I don’t know. It is very clear that God absolutely declares that whoever believes is saved and whoever does not believe will be condemned.

And then those last words. I do think we need to contemplate them for they drive us back to the grace and love of Jesus. The end says, **“On that day when he comes to be glorified among his saints, and to be marveled at among all those who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.”** Some important truths here.

First, Jesus is coming back. He is coming to be the Judge of both the living and the dead, a phrase that can also be understood to mean that Jesus will judge the believing and the unbelieving. Jesus is returning and it will be absolutely awesome in every way. The verse tells us **“On that day”** he will be **“glorified among the saints.”** I realize that I can’t fully appreciate the wonder of these words. What I can do is think of how Revelation tells us of the victorious Jesus surrounded by tens of thousands of angels, tens of thousands of souls washed white in his blood and the glory and majesty of the sight is greater than anything we have known or imagined. It is the picture of the wonder of heaven. With Jesus. Surrounded by the power, might and majesty of Jesus! Basking in the fully revealed glory of Jesus in complete joy, wonder and peace forever!

And why? Because we have believed. That’s what it says. It does not say, “Because you were so good and wonderful. Because you did everything I have told you and didn’t miss a single piece of my law.” We get heaven because we believe. Because Jesus is our Lord and Savior from sin. Because Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Faith. It is about faith in Jesus.

My simple prayer for all of us is this wonder of Jesus. Believe and be saved. Amen.