

I know you’ve seen them. We’ve *all* seen them: The constant stream of negative political ads running ahead of the mid-terms. They have a predictable format. The first half of the ad features the politician’s opponent. The ad is in black and white, and a scary voiceover lists all the awful things the opponent has done. “My opponent hates America...and probably hates babies too. Ask yourself, ‘Do you want an anti-America baby-hater in a position of power?’” Then the ad switches to color. Upbeat music starts to play and the politician behind the ad is featured pointing at things on construction sites and of course holding babies! “This November, the choice is clear,” says the voiceover.

Ok, maybe they’re not that ridiculous, but close to it. Here’s the weird thing about those ads. They work! As dumb as they are, people fall for them. It got me thinking... What other things have people fallen for? *Experian*, the credit reporting company, lists the latest scams to be aware of. They say, “Scammers continue to prove that *there’s no rest for the wicked*. While their goal—to get your personal information and money—remains the same, year in and year out, their strategies constantly change with the times. Fraudsters know people are most vulnerable when they’re desperate or scared and often use pressure tactics to prey on their victims. As in previous years, many of the latest scams in 2022 are twists on existing scams; and the measures that have protected you for years still apply.”

Here are a few: 1) Coronavirus and Government Program Scams: In one scam fraudsters used a government program that helps pay funeral expenses as the basis for a scam. 2) Phone-Related Scams: Some have natural-sounding recorded voices offering everything from auto warranties to vacations or to issue a threat to try and get your attention. 3) Impersonators: Scammers impersonate IRS personnel, police, survey takers, relatives, delivery people and well-known companies to threaten you or gain your trust. 4) There are Zelle Scams, Cryptocurrency Scams, and of course Romance Scams. While romance scams aren’t new, their popularity continues to rise. According to the Federal

Trade Commission, people lost \$547 million to romance scams in 2021, up 80% compared to 2020 and six times higher than 2017. Romance scams can target anyone, so beware of developing even a platonic relationship online.

The scam being perpetrated on the Thessalonians seems to be related to the first letter that Paul wrote to them. His first letter to these young, untaught Christians produced a serious misunderstanding that necessitated a second, clarifying letter. Specifically, his teaching that “*the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night*” (5:2) may have encouraged people to abandon normal pursuits to prepare for the second coming. Some people in Thessalonica may have been enticed to quit their jobs or tricked into giving up all their worldly goods to await the promised return of Jesus. Because of the imminent return of Christ, they became inactive busybodies despite what Paul wrote earlier.

If that is the case, Paul begins his second letter to the Thessalonians with remarkable restraint. The Son of God entered once into human history as Jesus of Nazareth primarily for the purpose of dying for our sins, so that all who trust in him might have new and eternal life. And he is coming a second time into human history not to atone for sin, but to complete and perfect our deliverance from all evil and pain. What I aim to do this morning is to describe some of the significance of Christ’s second coming and its relationship to the Lord’s Supper that we will celebrate in just a few minutes.

The Scripture this morning, 2 Thessalonians 1:3–12, gives us one of the fullest descriptions of that event and what it will mean for believers and unbelievers. Paul writes his second letter to the Thessalonian Christians who are being abused in various ways by unbelievers. He encourages them in verse 5 that this affliction is not a sign of God’s anger with them but a sign of his loving justice, because this is how the Lord refines their faith and makes them worthy of the coming kingdom. Verse 5 says, “*All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.*”

Then, in verse 6 he assures them that the tables will be turned: “*God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well.*” How Paul can know these things will happen at the coming of Christ is beyond my comprehension, but Paul explains that Christ’s second coming is going to mean punishment for those who reject Christ. To be sure, many of us don’t like to think in terms of divine retribution. This is not generally our idea of “good news.” But we have to look at the alternative. What kind of world are we living in if our actions have no lasting consequences? If we agree that life does not end with death, that life is eternal, can we make sense out of a universe in which everyone receives the exact same reward, irrespective of the way they lived. Can God be just and reward Osama bin Laden and Mother Teresa in the exact same way? Are there no lasting consequences to our actions over a lifetime?

The God of the Bible present with us in Jesus and the Holy Spirit, is the God who takes us seriously. Our lives matter. And our behavior has lasting consequences. Paul didn’t dream this up because he had sadistic tendencies. It was Jesus himself who taught this. Matthew 25 makes clear that those who feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the strangers, visit the sick and the prisoners, are rewarded. Those who ignore and neglect such acts of kindness are sent away. For those who reject Christ his second coming will mean confrontation with an irresistible and inescapable army from heaven, eternal destruction, and exclusion from “*the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might*” (v. 9).

But what will his coming mean for those who follow Christ with obedient living? *Reciprocal Glory*, that is, the mutual glorification of Jesus Christ in us and us in him. Just as the negative political ads running ahead of the mid-terms reflect poorly on the target of the ad, they equally tarnish the reputation of the other candidate. In fact I’d argue that those type of ads result in *Reciprocal Shame* for both candidates. Paul, however, prays for *Reciprocal Glory* to be given to the brothers and sisters at Thessalonica whose “*faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing*” (v. 3).

In verses 11&12, Paul says to these beleaguered Christians, “*We constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling... We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him...*” The power to live a life worthy of God’s calling is given to us by the Holy Spirit, a foretaste of glory, as Christ dwells in us by the Holy Spirit. But, while we live in this world there will always be a race to run and a fight to fight, the struggle to keep hoping in Christ instead of our achievements or possessions. But the second coming of Christ will mean the end of all our struggles. Everything physical and spiritual that threatens to make life unbearable will be gone, and we will have rest and release with the Lord forever.

Do any of you remember a scene from the day the prisoners of war came home from Vietnam? I seem to remember seeing on one side of a ship the wife who had waited six years for her P.O.W. husband who walked out on the other side and started across the deck. Behold her bridegroom comes! Come and meet him! And she did. And the whole world watched them embrace.

Paul said at the end of his life, “*Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing*” (2 Timothy 4:8). If we love Jesus, we will love his appearing. Do you love the prospect of Christ’s coming as much as that wife loved the appearing of her husband after six years as a P.O.W.? If not, we ought to pray to know him and love him with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. We may be dumb enough to think the Lord would fall for a positive political ad, to convince him that we are better people than we really are. But that won’t happen. Living an authentic Christian life is the way to reciprocate the glory of the Lord to whom we belong. His second coming will bring relief from every pain and trouble, as well as sheer joy when we see him face to face in *Reciprocal Glory*.

Today at the Lord’s Table may the celebration of his dying fill us all with a readiness and a love for his appearing. And as we come to the Table, may the name of our Lord Jesus be glorified in us, and we in him! Amen.