

Pax Et Securitas

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

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**Introduction:** We were having dinner at the Garnier's house 7 years ago in early May. We were fairly new to the church and were enjoying getting to know some of the families in the church. As we were sitting around eating venison burgers, though, my wife started complaining about labor pains. We quickly dismissed them, though, because she was a few weeks early and we had already had one child and he was right on time for his due date. But one of the ladies there decided to time what might have been contractions, and when she realized they were five minutes apart she made the decision for us that it was time to go to the hospital. Wesley was born that night to two parents who thought they would be ready for him, but were completely unprepared, lulled into false security because we had been through the whole labor and delivery thing before. We hadn't even settled on a name, so the nurse acted as the tie-breaker.

That's probably not the best labor and delivery story you've ever heard, but it's our most memorable one. And I've told it for a point. Today's text talks about a day that is coming, a day like no other- one that you won't find on any calendar- but it's talked about throughout the Scriptures. We are given a couple metaphors to help us understand its suddenness- that it will be as unexpected as a thief in the night and that it will be as unavoidable as labor pains upon a pregnant woman.

The Day of the Lord is not just some obscure theological term that seminarians study but nobody else needs to worry about. The Day of the Lord is the biggest day of all days that are left to happen in human history. The days of Creation were huge, of course, the day of Christ's incarnation was glorious, his resurrection day was monumental, but the Day of the Lord is quite literally the "Day to End All Days." It will bring the double-edged sword of destruction and reward. The phrase "The Day of the Lord" is used throughout the Bible to refer to God's judgment of and defeat of His adversaries- Joel 2:31, 2 Peter 3:10, Zeph. 1:14-16; as well as deliverance for God's people- Obadiah 15-21, Zech. 14. It is interchangeable with "the Day of our Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:8, 2 Cor. 1:14) and the "day of Christ" (Phil. 1:6, 2:16) in the New Testament.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

**5:1** Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. **2** For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. **3** While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. **4** But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. **5** For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. **6** So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. **7** For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. **8** But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. **9** For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, **10** who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. **11** Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

This passage is really better connected to the previous 6 verses at the end of chapter 4 that Dr. Dave preached on last week than the rest of chapter 5. Those verses addressed the question- "What will happen to those who have already died when Christ returns?" This week's passage addresses the question- "What about those who are alive when Christ returns" as well as how we are to live in view of the fact that Christ could return at any moment.

All of this passage is framed by the last phrase: "just as you are already doing." Remember the report about the Thessalonians? 1:9b,10- "how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, **10** and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."

So, what can we learn from this passage?

The first three verses are a word to those who want to know when the Day of the Lord will be.

**1) Forget the speculation and calculations, the Day of the Lord will come without warning. (v. 1-3)**

There are two extreme approaches regarding Christ's return:

1) to set up timetables and watch world events/ *reading in between the lines of Scripture*, and try to figure out exactly when He's coming back- I call that the "88 Reasons Jesus Will Return in 1988" approach (after the speculation of Edgar Wisenart). If you sit around counting the toes on the statues described in Daniel, or the horns in the visions of Revelation,<sup>1</sup> or try to figure out the political situation in the Middle East with regards to the "signs of the end," you're missing the point that Paul is making- that the day is impossible to know and will be sudden. Mark 13:32 can't be more clear: "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Why do you need to know the time? So you can live wildly until right before He comes back, then clean up your act just in time? Does that glorify God?

2) To say that it doesn't matter and that because He hasn't come back, He probably won't in my lifetime, so I'm not going to worry about it. The rest of this passage teaches our responsibility to think about Christ's return and live our lives accordingly.

I'm not sure people in our day can quite identify with the fear and devastation that a thief would strike in those days. Today we have electronic surveillance on our houses, keep most of our money in bank accounts far from our houses, and even if a thief takes everything, we have insurance to reimburse us. In first century AD, common folk had none of those to protect them against losing all of their valuables to a thief. We hear Jesus and Paul's comparisons and perhaps think, "What a pain that is to have to figure out what they stole and wrestle with the insurance company for reimbursement. We'll have to get extra locks and security too, but we're fine." A thief in the night would be devastating to the original audience, and so will the Day of the Lord to those who are not prepared spiritually.

Verse 3:

Paul echoes Matthew 24:37-39- **37** For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. **38** For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, **39** and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Jesus is using the flood as a foreshadowing or typology of the second coming (not to deny it's historical nature one bit!). The second coming will be like the flood, and we are like Noah as we prepare for its coming. People will assume that they have peace and security in their lives, when if they really understood their position, would realize that they were a moment away from being swept away and destroyed.

The Latin phrase that Paul uses in verse 3, "Pax Et Securitas," ("Peace and Security") was a slogan that the Romans used to assure the people that lived inside their vast empire that they would be taken care of. I think Paul uses this as irony- because we know that no government, no nation can bring ultimate Peace and Security to our lives. You might have seen the bumper sticker: "No Christ, No Peace, Know Christ, Know Peace." It's a very simple way to communicate a very compelling truth- that a human being is not secure and destined for peace in the afterlife unless he has been united with Christ and had his sins forgiven. To Know Christ is to find ultimate peace and eternal security, even if there are troubles in this world.

So, we have the first metaphor for the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming- the unexpected nature of a thief. The second metaphor is the inevitability of labor pains. When a woman conceives, the natural cycle of labor takes its course, the body takes over, there will be pain and eventually there will be a child. The nine-month timeline is a reminder that the course of events have been set and the end will happen when labor sets in. Similarly, we are living in the end times and the Day of the Lord is set, and will come on suddenly and unavoidably.

**2a) If you are a child of the light, you have nothing to fear from the Day of the Lord. (v. 4-8)**

➔ Read verses 4-8

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<sup>1</sup> Gene L. Green. *The Letters to the Thessalonians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002, pp. 229-246.

We are children of the light and of the day in three senses:

- 1) Knowledge- think of the saying, "you are in the dark" or "the light went on." I'm not saying we're smarter than unbelievers, but Christians have the light of revelation- There are @380 references in the Bible to Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. If you have not read the Bible or deny it's truth, you do not have that knowledge.
- 2) Knowledge is nothing without the illumination of the Holy Spirit. We are "children of the light" in our Spiritual state- 2 Corinthians 4:4,6- "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" but God "has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."
- 3) Morally- Those of the night do evil deeds and live by the flesh, those belonging to the day walk in obedience and live by the Spirit. Do most nonbelievers, who are of the darkness sit around and worry about being judged by God in the end? NO! They are either asleep, which Paul uses here to say that they are morally and spiritually indifferent, or they are drunk- which is not limited to alcohol, but connotes that they are engaged in the pursuit of illicit vices, desires and pleasures.

### **2b) Act Like Who You Are- Your identity (as a child of the light) does not excuse you from living right. (v. 4-8)**

The gift of grace carries with it the call to obedience: You have been made sons of the light and the day, so act like it. Paul tells us **twice** to be sober- so it must be very important. It certainly has the literal meaning that we should avoid being drunk, since that leads to losing control of our actions and speech and we cannot glorify God in such a way. But it also has the meaning that we are to be self-controlled in all ways, studious, sincere- there is a drunkenness of spirit that thrives on chaos and running to and fro that we should avoid. The Greek word can mean "well-balanced" and "self-controlled."

1 Peter uses that phrase 3 times- the first two times connected to Christ's return, the third time connected to suffering and resisting Satan.

1 Peter 1:13- "Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being *sober-minded*, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

1 Peter 4:7- "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and *sober-minded* for the sake of your prayers."

1 Peter 5:8- "Be *sober-minded*; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

I see that not just as a command to "not be something" but to be something- actively engaged our minds with spiritual truths and the Word of God applied to situations in our lives.

Again, if we know the time that He was coming back, we could clean up our act just in time. But since we don't- we must live our lives for the long haul of obedience.

### **3) Christ's death and God's electing love protect us. (v. 9-10)**

-> Read verse 9-10

Paul brings it back around to the gospel. He doesn't talk about the cross much in 1 & 2 Thessalonians. Why are we children of light? Is it because of how well we act? Is it because of how sober & alert we can act? NO!!! We are children of light because God chose us, He designed us, He destined us for salvation, not for wrath. And He accomplished it through Christ's death and resurrection. It doesn't say it explicitly here, but Jesus took God's wrath for us!

Whether we are awake or asleep, in other words, all the invisible church throughout all time will be gathered to Him on that last day.

### **Conclusion:**

Paul ended chapter four in the same way- "Therefore, encourage one another with these words." No matter what happens in this life, we always have a great reason to rejoice- we will be saved from destruction and brought into eternal union with our perfect Savior and Lord.

I will end with encouragements for four different groups of people:

1) If you are excited by the fact that one day Jesus will come back to end human history on earth and to judge all mankind, because you know that you are one of His family, hallelujah, I rejoice with you. "Lord, hasten the day!" Never forget that until that time, He has set His believers all over the world to be His hands and feet, to literally be the body of Christ as His visible and invisible church. We are to model His holiness, preach His truth and set our hope the glory of eternity.

2) If you are a believer but have sincere doubts that those around you will share in the salvation that Jesus will bring, seek opportunities to tell them why you have the hope of eternity. Let that be a great motivation to wake them from their sleep, and see them move from darkness to light.

3) If you are a believer but live as one who is still caught in darkness, I implore you to repent and seek to glorify the Lord with your life. Embrace the gospel in all its fullness, and realize that Jesus is both Savior and Lord over your life, and that you are being a disobedient son or daughter.

4) If you either do not believe that there will be any Day of the Lord, or are terrified by what might happen to you on that day, you must seek the Lord while He may still be found. I wish I could tell you that when you die or Christ comes back that you will have time then to weigh your options and choose Him, but at that point it will be too late! Consider the claims of the Scriptures that Christ died and was resurrected to win salvation for sinners like you and like me. Then call on the name of the Lord to forgive your sins and become Lord of your life. The angels will rejoice that your name has been written in the Lamb's book of Life. Only then will you have true "Pax Et Securitas" in your life.

#### Sources Used

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