

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, Week 9
 Sunday, November 5th, 2017

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

¹Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ²For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³While 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. ⁴But you are not in darkness brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. ⁶So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸But 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 through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. ¹¹Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

While last week's lesson addressed the destiny of those who have died before Christ's return, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 concerns the same eschatological event, but with the focus on those living on *the day of the Lord*. It tackles the idea regarding the timing of the Lord's return while conveying reassurance and hope. All of which have the power to motivate the reader to desire continued obedience and right living until the Lord's return.

Deep thought and earnest study have gone into the subject *concerning the times and the seasons* – a phrase referring to end times. Books have been written, articles have been posted, all seeking to predict the return of Christ. Theologians debate and offer different interpretations for end-time events. Our fascination with the *what, when* and *how* considering eschatological events are obvious. Perhaps the Thessalonians were asking questions concerning the timing of the Lord's return or how to prepare for His judgment. If this was the case, they were not the first ones to have asked questions in search for answers about Christ's return.

"Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Matthew 24:3

That fascination and wonder is not a bad thing, especially if it pushes us into a greater biblical understanding of the Scriptures and kindles a pursuit for more of Christ. However, on this journey we must hold fast to the words spoken previously by Christ *concerning the times*. In our studying and genuine search to know, we will never be able to predict His coming.

“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.” Acts 1:7

“Concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” Matthew 24:36

There is one divine secret being kept that not even the Son has knowledge of. This in no way diminishes the deity of Jesus but rather demonstrates His dependence on The Father (See the Gospels for evidence on both the deity of Jesus and His obedience to the Father).

If the idea of the Father withholding a secret is bothersome to you, would you consider thinking on a time when you kept a surprise a secret? Why did you do that? Perhaps your response included things like, *so at the revealing of that surprise ecstatic joy and celebration could be had*. It is neither surprise, nor a secret to us that one day Christ *will return*. The timing however is knowledge reserved by the Father. This is not because He’s cruelly withholding information, but more so (*I believe*) for the safekeeping of an element of astonishment that awaits for His children.

Consider this quote from The Expositors Bible Commentary on Matthew 24:36.

“Jesus’ disciples are morally bound to repress all desires to know what no one knows but the Father—not even angels or the Son. If the Son himself does not know the time of the Parousia, ‘how cheerfully should we his followers rest in ignorance that cannot be removed, trusting in all things to our Heavenly Father’s wisdom and goodness, striving to obey his clearly revealed will, and leaning on his goodness for support.’”¹

Resting in ignorance is nothing more than an opportunity for divine trust. Paul’s statement in 5:1 *“You have no need to have anything written to you,”* would have been a reminder similar to that of 4:9. He didn’t need to write to them concerning loving others because they had been taught already to do so – now he didn’t need to “write about times and dates because they already knew what they needed to know.”² Now they needed only to rest and trust in that knowledge.

¹ Carson, D. A. (1984). [Matthew](#). In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 508). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

² Martin, Michael D. *1, 2 Thessalonians*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen, B&H Publishing Group, 1995. The New American Commentary.

The Day of the Lord

The “*day of the Lord*” is rooted in the Old Testament with an understanding geared towards the judgment of the wicked. “The OT language of the Day of the Lord is thus aimed at warning sinners among God’s people of the danger of trusting in traditional religion without commitment to God and His way of life. The Day of the Lord is thus a point in time in which God displays His sovereign initiative to reveal His control of history, of time, of His people, and of all people. New Testament writers took up the OT expression to point to Christ’s final victory and the final judgment of sinners.”³

The Day of the Lord in the OT:

Isa. 13:6,9;
Jer. 46:10;
Ezek 30:2-3;
Joel 2:1-11;
Amos 5:20;
Zeph. 1:7-8;
Zech. 14

Regarding the day of the Lord, the Thessalonians were not unaware. Instead, Paul says they were *fully aware* that it would come like a thief in the night. Perhaps this knowledge came from the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels (Matt. 24:36-43; Luke 12:35-40) and was passed on by Paul to the Thessalonians. Peter and John were both well acquainted with this notion as well (2 Peter 3:10, Rev 16:15). Just as the believers in Thessalonica were taught to expect Christ’s return, so is the church today. Though we do not know the day or hour we are not surprised by the fact that He is coming again.

There are two groups that become visible in the progression of this portion of Scripture. As we’ve discussed, there are those who are not surprised (believers) and then there are those who are caught off guard (non-believers) on the day of the Lord. 5:3 interjects the condition of unbelievers on this day,

“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.”

The New American Commentary states that the clause, “while people are saying, ‘peace and security,’” is not a prediction of a time period in human history so much as a prediction of an attitude.⁴ These are unbelieving people who have not acknowledged need for a Savior. Since they have refused to turn to Christ and instead have loved the darkness, they are destined for destruction. The non-Christians are those who are “of the darkness.” They are also portrayed as asleep and drunk (5:6-7). Just as sure as labor is to come upon a pregnant woman, so will their destruction be unavoidable.

³ Brand, C., Draper, C., England, A., Bond, S., Clendenen, E. R., & Butler, T. C. (Eds.). (2003). [Day of the Lord](#). In *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 397). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

⁴ Martin, Michael D. 1, 2 *Thessalonians*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen, B&H Publishing Group, 1995. The New American Commentary.

Children of the Day

The Thessalonians were not in darkness – they were children of the day (5:4-5). “Children of light are true children of God. They have undergone a transformation that makes a new life (a life in the light) inevitable, not just preferable. Godliness for true sons of the light is not just a matter of appropriate actions; it is an outgrowth of their essential nature, their relationship to God.”⁵

As children of the day, they should keep awake and stay sober (5:6). The Greek word for “awake” is *grēgōrēuō* meaning to be vigilant, watchful.⁶ The word can also “indicate one who is aware of his surroundings.”⁷ Paul echoes again the directive to “be sober” in 5:8 but this time with an added emphasis on *how*.

“Having put on the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet the hope of salvation.” 1 Thessalonians 5:8b

Familiarity with other Pauline writings shows Paul’s pattern of taking disciplines of the Christian life and comparing it with the armor of a Roman soldier. One of the most detailed and recognized writing which uses this analogy is Ephesians 6. In 1 Thessalonians 5:8, Paul only illustrates his point using two portions of the armor – the breastplate and the helmet. Why did he use only two pieces of the armor in this text? “A Roman breastplate covered a soldier from his neck to his waist and protected most of his vital organs. That is what Christians’ faith and love do. Faith in God protects inwardly and love for people protects outwardly. These two graces cannot be separated; if one believes in God he will also love other people (1 Thes. 1:3; 3:5). In addition, the hope of salvation guards their heads from attacks on their thinking.”⁸ In singling out the breastplate and the helmet, Paul stressed the importance of guarding our faith and our minds.

In closing, Paul packs such hopeful reassurance to the believers in Thessalonica, as well as believers today. **We are not destined for wrath but for salvation made possible through the Lord Jesus Christ who died for us. There is nothing someone can do that would nullify the promise of salvation He has made for His children.** It is with these words, this promise, that the Church at Thessalonica could build one another up.

Dear friend, the day of the Lord is certain. The trumpet will sound and we will meet the Lord in the clouds. Can you even fathom? You can bet it will be the most glorious sight ever to behold, beyond anything we could imagine. With these things in mind, stay alert. Remain at your post. For He is coming soon.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Strong, J. (1996). *The New Strong's Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ Martin, Michael D. *1, 2 Thessalonians*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen, B&H Publishing Group, 1995. The New American Commentary.

⁸ Constable, T. L. (1985). *1 Thessalonians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 706). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.