

October 1, 2023

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 ESV

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. 9For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain 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.

Scriptures for further study:

Isaiah 13:9

Ezekiel 30:3

Joel 2:31

Malachi 4:1-3

Matthew 24:36-38

Revelation 22:20

“The expression ‘day of the Lord’ occurs five times in Joel and eleven times in the Old Testament. It refers to a day of the Lord’s wrath against his enemies and of blessings for the Lord’s faithful people.”

-The Spirit of Reformation Study Bible



Alertness

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

BIG IDEA: The proper preparation for the return of Jesus is not tied to when it will occur but how one should live in expectation of it.

Jesus’ return brings eagerness and alertness to the Christian heart.

OUTLINE

1. Suddenness

2. Security

3. Soberness

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

“Like an artist on top of the ocean-rock, painting the beauty of the village upon the shore, and so completely absorbed in his painting he no longer sees the rising tide, so also the foolish and evil people of our day, fascinated with earthly charms they will not realize that judgment is creeping upon them, coming closer and closer, until very suddenly it overtakes them, catching them wholly unprepared.”

-William Hendricksen

“Paul comforts the Thessalonians by reminding them that they are ‘children of light and children of the day’...people of the ‘day’ appropriately look forward to the meeting of the Lord.”

-Bob Cara

Paul may be responding to a question from the Thessalonians communicated by Timothy. That is, when the day of the Lord will occur (cf. Acts 1:7). The Thessalonians’ question likely arose more from anxiety than idle curiosity since Paul’s answer reassures rather than rebukes them and seems concerned with both the “how” and the “when” of the day of the Lord.

These verses are closely linked to 4:13–18: both offer reassurance concerning the fate of Christians at the second coming, and 5:9–10 alludes back to 4:13–18. It seems that the Thessalonians either were worried that they might not be prepared for the day of the Lord or were insecure about their status because of the recent unexpected deaths.

-ESV Study Bible

Praise to Jesus. Praise God that by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, you are a child of light and not darkness. Praise God that Jesus Christ had died so that you can live in Him and for Him.

Repentance through Jesus. Repent for the many ways that you are more eager for what this world offers than for what eternity offers. Repent for the many ways that you are more eager for the next football season, your next vacation, or your child’s wedding, than you are eager for the return of Jesus.

Consecration for Jesus. Rededicate your life to walk in faith, hope, and love in a profound way so that though the return of Jesus may catch you by surprise, it will not catch you off guard.

DISCIPLESHIP DURING THE WEEK

These “Sermon Discussion Questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. *Exploring the Big Idea.* Is it easier to plan for a scheduled event or maintain a ready posture for an unscheduled event that will happen, but you don’t know when?

2. *Thinking about Suddenness.* Read 1 Thess. 5:1-5. How does Paul assure the Thessalonians that though they may be surprised by the “day of the Lord” (which is the second coming of Jesus) they will not be caught off guard?

3. *Thinking about Security.* Read 1 Thess. 5:9-10. Do you feel a sense of dread, enthusiasm, or apathy? What security can be gained from the reality that Jesus is coming back?

4. *Thinking about Sobriety.* Read 1 Thess. 5:6-8. From verse 8, what are the three characteristics of being sober, according to Paul? What protection did the Thessalonians have that is yours as well?

5. What does it look like on a day-to-day basis for you to eagerly anticipate the return of Jesus? What are already doing which are gifts of the Spirit which He has given you to prepare for Jesus’ return?

“Paul tells this church that the fundamental Christian virtues of faith, love, and hope become the defensive armor that will ensure that the Christians are prepared for the ‘day of the Lord,’ whenever it comes.”

-Gene Green

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

1. What does Paul say in verse 11 that tells us the purpose of his teaching about Christ's return in verses 1-10? *(Verse 11 says "encourage one another and build one another up". Our certain hope of Christ's return is meant to encourage us. It is not meant to be something that brings anxiety or hopelessness. Keep that in mind as you study this passage with your children.)*
2. What does it mean that "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (verse 2)? *(It means that it will be a surprise and will be unexpected. Often when Christians talk about the return of Christ the discussion revolves around predictions for when Christ will return. You will want to tell your children that the term, "the day of Lord" speaks of Christ returning to judge all people and to bring the new heavens and new earth.)*
3. What imagery does Paul use in verses 4-7 to compare and contrast believers with unbelievers? *(He uses the imagery of light and darkness or day and night.)*
4. What is the good news that Paul reminds the Thessalonians of in verse 9? *(Paul tells the Thessalonians that God had given them the grace "to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ". This is a precious promise and truth that is meant to encourage us now as we live in a broken world.)*
5. How can our lives look different if we live with the hope of Christ's return? *(You will want to answer this question first to help your children think about their answer. Living in light of Christ's return any day should keep us dependent on Him and His grace. Knowing that Jesus is returning to make all things new should give us boldness to tell others about Him and give us the courage to share the love of Christ to those who are hurting, lonely, anxious, or those who are despairing. We can also live with confidence against the attacks of the Enemy based on Christ's gift to us in "the breastplate of faith and hope, and for a helmet the hope of salvation"(verse 8).)*

Scriptures for further study:

John 16:3

1 Peter 4:7-11

Acts 1:6-11

Revelation 21:1-7

FOR STUDENTS

1. When will the Lord return? (5:1-2) How will the Lord return? (5:1-3)
2. What contrast is there between believers and non-believers? (5:4-8)
3. What has God destined His people to? How did He do it? What is the confidence of our hope and what are we to do in light of that hope?
4. What stops you from living watchfully? How could you remind yourself to live for Jesus and not for the world's concerns?
5. What could faith, love, and hope protect you from in your life this week—and what would it look like for you to put that armor on?
6. Do you ever think of Jesus' salvation as a get-out clause? How does it encourage you to think that he died so that "we might live with him"?
7. Who could you encourage and build up this week, either by your actions or with a truth from this chapter?

FOR NON-BELIEVERS OR NEW BELIEVERS

1. Many Christians today seem overly focused on the exact times, and dates, and details of the end times. Paul's words here (vv.1-2) are a helpful reminder to focus instead on the major facts of Christ's second coming.

Question: How would you summarize in your own words the major themes Paul encourages us to keep in mind?

2. Christ's return is as unpredictable and sudden as it is inevitable. Destruction will come even while people are in mid-sentence of declaring "peace and safety" (v.3). See also Jesus' words in Matthew 24 for descriptions of people going about their normal lives ("eating, drinking, marrying," etc.) without any sense of what is about to happen.

Question: How does dwelling on this suddenness of events keep us watchful and sober?

3. If you are not a believer, there is a clear warning here in this passage that you must not miss. God the Judge is indeed coming back. If you are not right with the Lord at that time, this passage describes your experience as one of "destruction" (v.3)--which could be thought of in terms of separation from God that results in hopeless ruin. Other warnings include: "by no means escape" (v.3), and "suffer wrath" (v.9). These phrases, and others like them in the Bible, are intended to produce fear, but a fear that causes us to repent of sin and turn to Christ. 2 Peter 3:9 says that thus far he has been patient in his return, because he is giving us every last opportunity to repent and not perish.

Response: God's word implores you to get right with God now!

4. As Christians, why is it still important for us to not only know what we have been saved to, but also to be reminded of what we have been saved from (namely, the wrath of God)?

Question: How does this highlight the cross? How does this awareness deepen your faith and commitment?

5. For the Christian, Paul indicates that this teaching concerning our "hope of salvation" (v.9)—that is, our sure and certain expectation of a glorious future—is something that should "encourage us and build us up" (v.11).

Question: What aspects of Christ's return and of our future as believers most excites you to think about?

Scriptures for further study:

Matthew 24:36-51

2 Peter 3:3-13

2 Corinthians 5:10

6. While we as Christians have every reason to be excited about Christ's return, there are also some sobering reminders here in this passage about the need to not be "asleep" (i.e., morally indifferent), but rather to be self-controlled (temperate, avoiding excess). Jesus also cautions us in Matthew 24:45-47 to make sure we as his servants are found to be doing his work (i.e., being good stewards) when he returns. And 2 Peter 3 tells us that in light of Christ's return, we should lead "holy and godly lives" (v.11), "spotless, blameless, and at peace with him" (v.14).

Question: If you were to live your life right now with the conviction that Jesus is coming back soon, how would that affect your priorities, decisions, living, stewardship, and character?

A Surprising Gratitude: The Emergence of Faith, Love and Hope in Thessalonica



Sunflowers, Vincent Van Gough, 1888

About the artist and painting: In 1888, the Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh moved to southern France with a dream. He wanted to establish an art community where painters could live, work, and inspire one another. One of his mentors, a man he deeply respected, Paul Gauguin, agreed to come and live in this community. As a symbol of his thankfulness and happiness, Van Gogh painted a series of sunflower paintings and hung them in his room. The sunflower meant to reflect his surprising joy towards achieving a dream.

The apostle Paul was probably not an artist but he did produce a letter expressing his surprising joy, his thankfulness, and happiness. This letter was his “sunflower” to the church Thessalonica. It’s Paul’s verbal painting of Gospel Gratitude. What are things you a most grateful for in your life? Has the Gospel taken root in your heart? If so, what fruits of gratitude are being produced and overflowing in your life as a result of Jesus?

In his opening words from Paul to the Thessalonians, he writes:

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,
3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. The same faith, hope, and love that made a difference in the lives of believers then can make a difference in your life now. **“I’m excited for what God has in store for us First Presbyterian Church, as the Spirit washes us in these words of Gospel gratitude. May Christ be our hope for the world to come, our faith for today, and our love for a lifetime”** Pastor Bill Pardue

The purpose of 1 Thessalonians:

“A Surprising Gratitude: The Emergence of Faith, Love and Hope in Thessalonica”

"The purpose of 1 Thessalonians is for Paul to convey to the Thessalonians how encouraged he is by the good report about them and to deal with other aspects of the news brought by Timothy." - Cara, 1 and 2 Thess. 22-23

Paul writes to express his GRATITUDE for the firm faith of the church and their expression and commitment to brotherly love. At the same time, he desires to see the church grow in holiness and provides information and encouragement concerning the hope we have in the certain and imminent return of Jesus Christ.

"The concern Paul had for this congregation was so overwhelming he decided to send Timothy back to the city to 'strengthen and encourage' the believers in their faith and to 'find out about' their faith...1 Thessalonians was written after Timothy arrived in Corinth to report his findings to Paul...He brought good news of the faith, love, and steadfastness of the congregation despite hardships. - Green, PNTC, 52.