
Times and Seasons

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Thinking about Jesus' coming from 1 Thessalonians 4 and Matthew 24...

Jesus is certainly coming back...

Jesus will come for and with the saints...

Those who are alive will be caught up along with those being resurrected...

This will happen because when Jesus comes, He gathers up the elect from the four winds and from the heavens...

This will happen when Jesus comes and sets up His throne from which He judges...

Now, the Lord willing, at the end of our studies in Thessalonians, we are going to spend some time updating our timeline. We have gone through the book of Daniel, Joel, Matthew and now 1 Thessalonians. We will be tackling 2 Thessalonians in two more studies. Those texts will us to fill in some important details.

We saw the importance of these truths in the grief of dying as Christians...

Now we will be shown the importance of these truths in light of living as Christians...

Our Present Situation

(v.1-5)

Understand the truth you have been taught.

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.

Adequate Teaching

(v.1)

The opening sentence is a topical sentence for this section. He is going to talk about their clear understanding of a truth. They have had adequate teaching on the subject of God's future plans. This idea of "times and seasons" is both a common way of speaking about this and signals a connection between what is going on here and Jesus' teaching in Matthew.

So, Paul is simply summarizing in this sentence all the teaching he gave them when he was with them and that we had tried to give you over the last months.

Clear Connections

(v.2-3)

At the core of this teaching is that the "Day of the Lord" will come "like a thief in the night." Now these two phrases need some fleshing out. But in order to do that I want you to note at least the order in which Paul writes on these topics. Chapter 4 which is in regards to the resurrection and catching up of the saints precedes this text on the day of the Lord.

Now what is the Day of the Lord? The clearest teaching on the Day of the Lord is from Joel. It is an awful day of judgment when God will pour out His wrath upon the unbelieving people just before the last day of judgment. It is a day of the wrath of God on this earth in real time and space.

According to Peter, preaching in Acts 2:14-41, it is preceded by a period in which the Spirit comes into the world, the gospel goes out into the world and people can believe and be saved. Peter sees himself as preaching between the outpouring of the Spirit and the outpouring of the wrath of God, both of which were prophesied in Joel 2:28-32. Here is what Peter said (Acts 2:16-21).

¹⁶ But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ " 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; ²⁰ the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

The New Testament writers see the Day of the Lord as something that is yet to come. While we are living "in the last days" which began with the outpouring of the Spirit of God at Pentecost, we have not yet seen the Day of the Lord come yet. Wonderfully then, we are still able to give the gospel and call people to faith and repentance.

I want to mention two other significant texts which we will study later.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 - ¹ Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

2 Peter 3:8-13 - ⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Paul also points to Jesus' language in Matthew 24:43 using the metaphor of a thief in the night. He is clearly connecting us to what Jesus said about watching and waiting because many events will take place that will be mile stones indicat-

ing that His coming is near. But, like Jesus, the exact time¹ of that coming is not known and therefore we have to be watchful.

Jesus and Paul are both pointing to the fact that we do not know for certain the exact time of Jesus' coming (Matthew) and the beginning of the Day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians). Jesus not only points to the gathering of the saints at His coming, but also world-wide outpouring of His wrath and the final judgment as well.

Needful Explanation (v.4-5)

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.

In this context of commending, clarifying and connecting what they have learned, Paul gives them a needed reminder. The simple point here is that they need to remember who they are as they are waiting. They are in the darkness. They are children of the light, children of day. Since this is who we are then it has a powerful impact on how we wait.

Our Important Responsibility (v.6-8)

Live in the light of truth applying it as we ought.

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.

See Paul's development? Here is what you have been taught (v.1-3) and here is who you are (v. 4-5). Now then, since these are true, here is what you must do about it. Here are your important responsibilities flowing from God's plan for God's people.

This is structured on two commands and a prerequisite. We are not to sleep. We are to be sober. We are to do these two things having already donned the faith, hope and love armor. To help you remember this easily, I want to call you to three important responsibilities.

To Watchfulness (v.6-7)

As God's people waiting for Jesus' return we must be awake and watchful. This language reflects the call in many places in the Old Testament for God's people to be awake, watchful, careful. Israel was often lazy, slothful, slumbering in sin and spiritual drift. This is a mark of people who are of the darkness, not people who are of the light.

The word was also used to refer to the alert wakefulness required of soldiers on night guard duty. Because of the darkness and the dangers surrounding them, the guards were to stay alert for the sake of their comrades in arms. It seems to me here in this text that watchfulness against sin and sloth and spiritual drift are being commanded.

Paul is address those in the church at Thessalonica who were quitting their jobs, abandoning their responsibilities in order watch and wait for Jesus to come back. Two misunderstandings were causing this. First, they did not understand that the time frame in which Jesus was to come back had not started yet. Paul has already

dealt with that in the first paragraph. Second, they misunderstood what being watchful meant – it did not mean to sit all day on a hilltop looking up into the sky. Paul countered that so strongly that by end of 2nd Thessalonians, those who persisted in this were commanded to return to work, were to be marked out as idle people and to be shunned until they repented.

So brothers and sisters, while you are watching and waiting, work hard at what God has given you to do.

To Seriousness

(v.7-8)

As God’s people we are to be “sober”. This word is not referring to alcohol or drunkenness. It is referring to be sober minded or serious. Christians, in view of the coming of the Lord, are to have a serious mindedness about life. We are not to be flippant, casual and unconcerned about things. We are to be careful, discerning, thoughtful, yes, even, thinking about life.

Paul’s age and culture were very similar to ours. He lived in the beginning of the decay of Rome where entertainment, play, follies, sports all took the place of serious living. Eat, drink and have fun while the world around them sank under debt, internal rot, political instability, and the pressure of the invading hordes. In this kind of setting, Christians tended then and now to escapism, frivolity, entertainment, self-delusion accompanied by a rejection of serious self-examination and thought.

So brothers and sisters, while you are watching and waiting, be serious about the serious stuff.

To Preparedness

(v.8)

...having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

Finally, we are to be alert to sin and serious over life because we have prepared ourselves spiritually. Do you see it? “Having put on...” Here in a sense is the prerequisite. The Christian soldier is alert and serious, standing with our breastplates and helmets on.

Paul’s beloved trinity of faith, hope and love are the central features of Christian walk and maturity. Since the metaphor here is different from Ephesians 6 we should be careful trying to reconcile this with Ephesians. Both are probably drawn from Isaiah 59:17.

The point is that this is the personal spiritual environment of our character. Faith is believing God in an obeying way. Faith believes what has said about His coming in such a way that produces holy living. Love is a treasuring of God, a genuine desire and affection for Him that produces an anticipation for His coming. Hope is what emerges when faith and love join in the heart. Hope is the assurance that the great lover of our souls has promised He will return for us, that He will bring with Him the fullness and fulfillment of all that His salvation promised.

Faith, love and hope will then cause us to often open the front door, look down the path to the gate and even more, to shield our eyes into the setting sun to see if our Savior is near.

Our Assuring Reason

(v.9-10)

How is it that our hope in our salvation is settled and firm? Because our future is totally secured.

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.

God's Predestination

(v.9)

Our salvation is sure because of God's predestination. He has determined in eternity past what He will do in time and history. He has not destined His people for wrath. Rather, He has ensured that they will receive their salvation. That wrath will be avoided and salvation actually obtained through Jesus Christ alone.

I know for many this doctrine is a difficult one. But the Bible is clear about it. The Spirit has inspired in the Word, not to disturb us, but rather to comfort and to assure us. Hope rises up when faith believes what our loving God has designed, determined and done in history. As His child I am not bound for wrath but for great and grand privileges His salvation entails.

Let us rejoice that God has not destined us for His wrath. This is clearly referring to both day of the Lord and the day of final judgment. The day of the Lord is that brief period of time when God's wrath will be poured out on unbelievers in the end of days. The final day of judgment is when God levels His wrath on all who have not believed at the White Throne judgment. It is God's so very great mercy that we will escape the day of the Lord and will be found safe in Him on the day of judgment. Why? Because of Jesus. And so our heart longs and yearns for Him.

God's Purpose

(v.10)

Further, our hope is assured that God's purposes will be accomplished. His purpose is assured through the death of His Son. His purpose is not thwarted by our own death. He has aimed that His children will live with Him. So, through His death and resurrection we know that whether we live or die (awake or sleep) we will live with Him.

Our Comforting Responses

(v.11)

Since these things are so, then be continually one-anothering.

¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

Mutual Encouragement

We are called to encourage and comfort one another. The Lord wants us to give confidence to one another through truth. This is not just Christian ra-ra-ism. In the same way that Paul has encouraged and comforted through truth, so should we. It is our great tool of comfort – to stir up faith, to light the fire of love, to help focus future hope through the Word of God.

But for this to be effective, we must be a people who are poised to be encouraged by truth. If we demand that our spirits be lifted up, our confidence strengthened by other means, then we will be vulnerable to growing discouragement and depression.

Mutual Edification

We are called to build up one another. This important word has nothing to do with self-esteem or affirmation. It has to do with laying the blocks of truth so as to construct a firm foundation of belief from which our desires, affections and actions rise.

Edification is what Paul has done in the face of their being uninformed or misinformed. He has edified them by informing them what will happen on the day of Jesus' coming when the dead and the living saints will rise to meet Jesus. He has edified them by ensuring that they are rightly applying the truths of the second coming so that they will live in this world pleasing to God by faith with love in hope.

Reflect and Respond

Since we do not know the day or the hour, let us be on the guard against sin. May the Lord's second coming cause us to live ever more pleasing to Him.

Since we do not know the day or the hour, let us be serious about the important things. Yes, let us rejoice even in the hard stuff – but let us seek to be sober-minded.

Encourage and edify one another with truth marinated in love for the hope of our salvation.

It has been the aim of this sermon to encourage you and to edify you by the truth. May God make it so.

Notes

¹ I am not here teaching what is called the “imminent” return of Christ. As we taught from Matthew 24-26, I do not believe that the Scriptures support the idea that Jesus could come at any moment. There clearly were events that must take place before Jesus returns. This will be even more clear when we work through 2 Thessalonians 2.