

Nov 8 - Last Judgment

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ²for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

⁴But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. / ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

It's not just the USA, the entire world is going through massive changes. The United States has been withdrawing its influence from the world and turning inward. This causes huge problems for most countries that need the protection of the United States for trade across the oceans. The population is growing old and less productive in most countries, and this year the pandemic has intensified these issues. These problems do not by themselves predict that Christ is coming soon. Regardless, we live expecting him to come at any moment, because He promised He is coming. Because He is coming, we don't need to live in fear about what is happening in our country and indeed around the world. Rather as the Apostle Paul urges the Christians in the Thessalonian church, he tells us to **Encourage one another as we wait for Jesus to come again.**

1. In Him we will not be surprised (1-3)

Ever since Jesus ascended into heaven, some Christians have tried to determine the time and date of his coming again, but it's foolish to predict the day. As Paul writes to the Thessalonian Christians, "about times and dates we do not need to write to you" (v 1). God has not revealed in Scripture when the Savior will return. Jesus himself during his earthly life did not know when the end would come. He said, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36).

Jesus will come—suddenly, as Jesus told the disciples (Matthew 24:44), as Paul reminds the Thessalonian Christians and as Peter would tell his readers in another letter (2 Peter 3:10). Paul says, "While people are saying, 'Peace and safety'" (v 2), Jesus will come "like a thief in the night" (v 1).

Have you watched on public television or Netflix the series entitled "Call the Midwife"? The British program describes the work of maternity nurses in East London. It seems that in every episode at least one of the expectant mothers is caught by surprise when her labor starts while shopping or attending some event. That must have happened to Christian mothers in Thessalonica as well, because Paul uses their example to show how Jesus' arrival will surprise us.

That television series shows the birth of many children, and it seems that every time the mother has a bright smile on her face when she receives her newborn child in her arms. We will also be able to rejoice when our Savior comes because he will take us from the turmoil, conflict and dread of this fallen world to be with him. We don't know just when Jesus is coming, but we can look forward to it, because...

2. In Him we can be confident in a dark world (4-10)

We can look forward with confidence and even joy in the promise that our Savior is coming soon, because Paul tells us so. He says, “You...are not in darkness” (v 4).

Those who do not know their Savior and who do not trust in him have no real hope. They think our Christian hope is foolish. They think we’re living a fantasy. Paul, the other apostles, and the early Christians experienced the same cynicism and ridicule in their sin-darkened world. Peter said: “They will say, ‘Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation’” (2 Peter 3:4).

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the real foolishness is thinking that hope lies in what people think they and their institutions can do. Look at what’s happening in our country. It is deeply divided. Neither side trusts the other. Each side expects disaster. This is the story of the world since the fall of Adam and Eve into sin. One empire or nation after another has failed, one after another. Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, Rome, France, Great Britain, Germany, Russia, China, Japan have all enjoyed periods of relative peace and prosperity. Those nations or empires all collapsed.

The people in Jerusalem thought their city would not be destroyed, even though God had told them repeatedly through his prophets that the walls would be leveled, and their beautiful temple destroyed. “‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14). Suddenly it seemed, the Babylonian army arrived, and the siege began; there was no peace.

For all the dreams of grandeur and prosperity, this world remains a dark place. Grim reality sets in and it leads to despair and immorality. Those “who get drunk, get drunk at night” (v 7), Paul writes. Attempts to control society apart from Christ eventually lead to a loss of self-control—to drunkenness, addiction, theft and the destruction of property.

The darkness also leads to apathy. They are “asleep” (v 6), Paul writes. When you and I are overwhelmed with worry and disillusioned by the grandiose promises of failing institutions, when we begin to think that self-control is pointless, when we become indifferent to God’s Word and live as if Christ is never going to come, we are turning to the darkness.

Then, turn back to Christ. Remember that he is your Savior. Remember who you are. The Apostle Paul says, “You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness” (v 5). Why? “[Because] God did not appoint [you] to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through [your] Lord Jesus Christ” (v 9). As Paul reminded his young coworker Timothy later, “God ... wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4, NIV11). God your Savior wants to receive you in his loving arms when he comes for you on the last day.

You know this is true, Paul says. “[Our God and Savior] died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him” (v 10). Turn your eyes from the darkness of this world and set them on the cross. See there your Savior dying at the hands of cruel, dark world. Hear him speak of forgiveness, life, paradise and the end of the punishment necessary for our sins.

Hear the Apostle tell you that “you are sons of light” (v 5). You do not “belong” to the darkness (v. 5). This means that God regards you as his dear children. It’s your status, whether you are awake or sleeping, whether you are in a coma lying in hospital bed or alert and hearing God’s promises, whether your bodies fall asleep and die, or your bodies are still living when Christ comes—“you are sons of light, you do not belong to the darkness.”

And hear this! The Apostle tells you that “you are all sons of light” (v 5). How do you know this promise applies to you—that like the Thessalonian Christians you are among “all” the sons? Have you not been baptized? Have you not received in baptism Christ’s name and the forgiveness of sins? Has God not adopted you as his dear child? Has he not arrayed over you the righteous robe of Jesus Christ? Do

you not receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper? Do you not hear Jesus' words that this bread is his body given for you and that this wine is his blood shed for you for the remission of your sins?

Therefore, live as sons of light. Remembering what God has made you, control yourselves. Be in God's Word; read it, meditate on it. Manage your time, finances and health. When the world around us seems to descend into darkness, when our lives seem to be sinking into oblivion, remember that you are sons of the light and daughters of the day. Next week our church will offer an exercise class. If your circumstances permit, participate in that and learn exercise routines to take care of your body. Watch your diet. Try to live within your means. This is especially important when the future does not seem bright in our country or the world generally, and understand this well, the world, not just the United States, is going through massive changes. We live in a challenging time. By controlling our time, finances and health, we are more able to help our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Apostle thinks of those Roman soldiers who police the cities, roads and shipping lanes of his world. They wear armor. Paul reminds you to "[put] on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet" (v 8). Faith is trust in the promise that in Jesus Christ your sins are forgiven. Love follows faith. We'll come back to that thought in a moment. Hope is the reason why we trust and love. We have hope because Jesus is coming again. We have hope because the mess we live in now will end, just as a mother's burdensome pregnancy will end. We have hope because we are not alone. God is with us in Scripture and in the Sacraments. God promises that the Holy Spirit dwells within us. God has brought us into His Church.

3. Because of Him we can encourage one another (11)

Paul says it this way, "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." (v 11).

The Thessalonians were essentially no different than we are today. Like us, they were tempted to be lazy. Several times in this letter and the second one he would send later, the Apostle Paul admonishes his readers not to be lazy. Perhaps because they were expecting Christ to come at any moment, they were not busying themselves by supporting their families and helping each other in the church. Instead they became busybodies, perhaps gossiping and criticizing other people in the congregation.

We have work to do in our church to encourage one another. This is one of the reasons why we attend church when we feel physically safe enough to do so—we encourage one another by doing so. We can pray for one another—there is a prayer group that we can participate in via text messages. We can communicate with each other when attending church, by Facebook or other forms of social media. We can help each other. Perhaps someone needs food. Perhaps another needs transportation to church or to a doctor. Perhaps another needs help fixing things up at home. We rejoice that you are doing these things. Keep it up! **Encourage one another as we wait for Jesus to come again.** Amen.