

## 1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

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Brian Orchard, February 3, 2017

When Paul spoke to the Church in Thessalonica he offered words of deep motivation and encouragement to them. In fact, he says that's what he was trying to do; to motivate, to encourage them. They had been called to salvation and he tried to motivate them to spiritual growth and to keep that focus. Because after saying the wonderful things he said about these people – what an example they are, they were known throughout the region – he says to them, at the beginning of chapter 4:

**1 Thessalonians 4:1 Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more,**

So what they were doing was good, but they needed more. And, as I said earlier, this was a fledgling Church in some ways. So Paul was saying, "You've done a great job so far. Let's keep going. Let's put our shoulder to the wheel and keep going."

After addressing the resurrection at Christ's return (the carrot, so to speak), he then proceeds to offer a warning. This is a very real warning. And, given the day and age in which you and I are living, we need to pay careful heed to it.

**1 Thessalonians 5:1 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you.**

Now, I'm not going to get into the great issue over Paul's sense of timing as far as Christ's return is concerned. I've heard, and even made the argument myself, in years past that Paul thought Christ's return was quite close.

Having worked with this material now rather extensively, I'm not so convinced that he felt that it was that close. But, in trying to encourage the Church, he may well have left them with an impression. It's very human to want think that Christ's return is closer and closer than it might actually be. So, I don't think Paul was thinking in just a week, a month, or a year or so Christ's return was going to come. Remember, these words are motivational. It's written for us. The subject and the timing of it, certainly, is appropriate for us.

This statement "concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you," is against the backdrop of Christ's saying, "Of that day and

hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.” So, Paul knew that as he made this statement. “Times and seasons,” simply is a space of time and what happens at that time. So, what Paul is saying is: “This should be clear to you, we’ve covered it before. Christ covered it as part of the gospel that I have brought to you. I shouldn’t need to go back over this again.”

He had just addressed the specifics of the resurrection at Christ’s return, but not the timing of when; because the hope is not based on knowing when. It’s a motivation for God’s people at all times! Now, Paul did not intend the motivation to be based in believing it would be in their lifetime. Do we need a specific date in order to work on our relationship with God? Unfortunately, humanly that maybe is a factor in some of our lives. But we should not need a date in order to do the things that God is wanting us to do. In Hebrews 11, picking it up in verse 13:

**Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.**

Imagine what these people did in their day and age with promises that were afar off. But they embraced them and they motivated their lives at that day.

**14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.**

Have we got our eyes on the resurrection? Have we got our eyes on the Kingdom or do we still have one eye on the world (one eye on the reality of what’s going on in our lives) and one eye on the Kingdom?

**15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.**

**16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.**

We have to be motivated by faith in the promises that God has held out for us – the hope of the resurrection; the hope of the Kingdom of God, if you will. So back in chapter 5 of 1 Thessalonians, verse 2:

**1 Thessalonians 5:2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.**

Here is the warning. Paul is simply using Christ’s own statements to make this point – that Christ’s return will be unexpected. It will not come at a time that people think. “Oh, everything’s put together. I’ve got all of these dates together.”

Not so long ago I gave a sermon where I focused in on some of this. When I came home from that service where I gave that sermon on a sense of urgency, taking some of these warnings, there was an email waiting for me from somebody who was informing

me that they know exactly when Jesus Christ is returning and they laid it all out for me. If you want to know, you'd better be ready in 2023. He had it all figured out and there it was. Well, I can guarantee one thing. It won't be 2023. We don't know and we're not going to know. And if we have to know in order to be motivated, something is lacking spiritually in our lives.

You are aware of Matthew 24 and Luke 21, but let's just go to Revelation 16, verse 15 and, in a most unlikely setting, Christ makes this point. We're talking about the battle of the great Day of God Almighty. And in the middle of this context, where the kings of the earth and the whole world are being assembled together to do battle against Jesus Christ, Christ says:

**Revelation 16:15 "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."**

The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians addresses nakedness in the sense of lacking spiritual clothing. Anybody who's not spiritually where they need to be is as though they are naked.

But Christ said, "I will come as a thief." A thief does not come when you expect him to come. The thief makes sure. He tries to plan it so you are not aware that he's coming to rob your house or whatever it is that he's going to do.

It will not be apparent. Paul is calling for action based on faith. "The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." And our motivation needs to be spiritually based. That's the whole point. It's not physically based on circumstances and what we see, what we read, what we understand is happening in the world.

If you only look at the circumstances of the world, it's easy to draw a wrong conclusion. We've done that consistently for years – looked at the world, saw certain trends were coming to pass so, therefore, this is going to happen; but it didn't. We're foolish if we take the trends that are around us and use them to make a forecast of what's going to happen. Let's look at verse 3 of chapter 5 of 1 Thessalonians.

**1 Thessalonians 5:3 For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.**

And I pause there and I say to myself, why would somebody be saying peace and safety? Well, there are a couple of factors. One I don't place a lot of weight on, but the world itself will be saying peace and safety at that particular time. Just to touch on that, since we've mentioned it. In Revelation 18, verse 3, after the beast power has come into power, it tells us:

**Revelation 18:3 For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury."**

So, when the beast power comes about and the political and the religious combine, there is going to be wealth; there is going to be prosperity in the world. We see in verse 11, same chapter:

**Revelation 18:11 "And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore:**

**12 merchandise of gold and silver,**

A very wealthy, very rich time. A time when people will be inclined to say peace and safety. Look at what we're doing, this great world system of government (except that it is the mystery Babylonian system of government). But this is why I don't put a whole lot of weight on this. Israel is in captivity, or has gone in or in the process of going into captivity, during this period of time. So peace and safety as far as Israel is concerned I don't think is a huge factor. Nor do I think the Church will be saying peace and safety, because the Church will be experiencing martyrdom through the tribulation; at least that section of the Church that is not given safety and protection.

So, I'm not sure that peace and safety here is a major factor for us except for this factor. Let's go back to Deuteronomy 29 and verse 18. This is something for us to pay attention to. I'm breaking into a thought.

**Deuteronomy 29:18 so that there may not be among you man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood;**

**19 and so it may not happen, when he hears the words of this curse, that he blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall have peace, even though I follow the dictates of my heart' — as though the drunkard could be included with the sober.**

This is a mental frame of mind that is being talked about where somebody is saying, 'I shall have peace, even though I'm following the dictates of my heart'. Is this not an attitude of heart that equates with the attitude of the seventh Church that's mentioned in Revelation? I think so.

A group of people who say, "Because I am rich and have become wealthy and have need of nothing." And so this attitude of peace and safety can simply be an attitude of mind where you think you're okay. Let's be honest. Have you not thought this through at some point and come to the conclusion that, "I'll get there. I'll be right. There are things that I need to do. I know I need to be doing them, but it's okay. I'll get to them and everything will be right by the time the call goes, the trumpet is blown or whatever."

I may be phrasing that roughly, but we've all had those thoughts. We don't want to sit here and think: "I know I need to do more than I'm doing and I probably am not going to make it." We don't sit around and think like that. So here is a warning:

**1 Thessalonians 5:4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.**

**5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.**

Day and light, night and darkness are very real spiritual concepts. And both of them have a bearing on your mental frame of mind relative to the preparation for this period of time. John states clearly that God is light. He says it in his gospel. He says it in his first epistle. God is light. Darkness is associated with sin and its source. Look at Ephesians 6, verse 12.

**Ephesians 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.**

And again, if you wish to do a little further revision, there is a recent Bible Study given by Matt King on the subject of the source of sin where he very heavily delves into sin having a source. It would be good to review it in light of this as well. Darkness is associated with sin at its source. In John 12, verse 35:

**John 12:35 Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer the light is with you. (He's referring to Himself.) Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.**

This plays into what Paul is talking about here in terms of a warning. "Walk while you have the light." Now, he's talking to the disciples and they had Christ there in their midst. We have Christ living within us so we have light as a part of our being. But darkness surrounds us. And we have the ability to contact and move towards light or darkness. We are still free moral agents. We have to make choices. We can go in either direction.

**36 While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."**

If we walk in darkness, this day that's being referred to here will overtake us as a thief. You do not know where you are going, as John says here. Now the formula is not a complicated formula. Our spiritual frame of mind will reflect our closeness to the source – the source of light or the source of darkness. And the further we are away from the source of light, the less we will see what is going on and we will be caught by surprise. Something will happen unexpectedly and we will not be ready.

If we're closer to the light, as we should be, we will see and we will be ready. So, it's not a very complicated formula.

**Proverbs 4:18 But the path of the just is like the shining sun** (Like the sun at midday. You can see clearly where you're going and everything around you.), **that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.**

That's spiritual growth. If we are close to the source of light, God, our understanding, our enlightenment will be bright. We will see, we will understand, we will discern. We don't need signs to tell us. We will just know from a spiritual perspective what we should and should not be doing.

**19 The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know what makes them stumble.**

They are walking along, it is dark. They don't see that object and they stumble over it. They do not know what makes them stumble. It's like the return of Jesus Christ. People walking in the darkness. Something happens, they stumble over it. They didn't see it. There was no light to show them and they were not prepared for that which they stumbled over. So, I think in verse 19, we can well read unexpected into this. They do not know what makes them stumble.

**Ephesians 5:8 For you were once darkness** (Wandering around in this world without the Spirit of God, without being called is darkness.), **but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light**

**9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth),**

**10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.**

Hope, waiting, walking in light are all actions; things that need to be done. Find out what is acceptable to the Lord. Being awake, being prepared is acceptable.

**11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.**

Because if you have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness you will be blind to the degree that you get involved with the source of that darkness. You will lose discernment. You will lose the alertness. You will lose, certainly, any sense of urgency for what we need to be doing at this time.

**12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.**

**13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.**

The spiritual condition of sleep that Paul refers to comes from our proximity to the night and darkness in reality. The light shows us what to move away from, to get closer to the source of light! So back in 1 Thessalonians 5, verse 6:

**1 Thessalonians 5:6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do,**

And this is referring to sleeping spiritually. This is not referring to death now. He's referred to death and sleep as far as the resurrection is concerned. Now he's saying don't be asleep as others do:

**...but let us watch and be sober.**

Let us watch and be self-controlled. Not being forced into action by circumstances, but simply by motivation. Doing it because we know it's the right thing to do. We know that time is running out and doing it just simply because we want to be holy and we want to be pleasing to God and we want to represent God.

**7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night** (in the darkness).

**8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on** (here's the action again)

**...putting on the breastplate of faith and love** (and notice this), **and as a helmet the hope of salvation.**

The helmet, the mind, the hope of salvation; it's motivational for us to do what we need to do. This is a warning to us not to be caught unawares. And if we wait and allow world conditions to motivate us, it will be too late. It just will be too late, because those conditions change unexpectedly and rapidly. If you're waiting until the world gets to a certain point of evil before you start to do the things you need to do, it will be too late. That's what this warning is about – the suddenness, the thief coming at a time when you expect not.

**9 For God did not appoint us to wrath,**

It's not God's desire. God does not want us to miss out on the hope of the resurrection and eternal life, the change of our bodies into spirit

**...but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,**

That's what God wants. That's why, He, in love, warns us and encourages us and motivates us to be prepared for what is coming.

**10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.**

That's God's desire. Whether we wake or sleep makes me feel that Paul wasn't thinking that this was just around the corner. At any time in the history of the Church there have been people called and come into a relationship with God and are working

out salvation. They die, so they're asleep. And there will be some who are awake. We're awake now. We're listening to this. We're reading this. This, over a period of time, so that we should live together with Him. That's what God wants.

**11 Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.**

This means to instruct or to warn or to encourage. So we help each other. And if we are talking or in fellowship with fellow brethren and you see that somebody might be falling into a trap of setting dates (of getting so wrapped up in prophecy that they're so bound up in predictions that they're failing to see their own spiritual condition, their own spiritual need), as a brother or a sister you might need to point some of these things out. You might need to encourage them to look at the spiritual things that are far more important than the assessment of what is going on in this world.

But, like I said, just here a few weeks ago I received this email informing me, specifically (he takes in the 120 years of Noah preaching before the flood). There are still people wrapped up in this. Let it not be us. Let us have learned that lesson, stay away from those things and just be motivated by the encouragement that God gives us of hope; the hope of the resurrection. And let us strengthen each other and encourage each other.

**1 Thessalonians 3:12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you,**

**13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.**

That you will be there, ready with your lamp completely filled with oil and you are waiting for the Kingdom of God to be established, for Christ's return and for the family of God to be established at that first resurrection and you're ready to be a part of it. That, clearly, is God's desire. He wants us to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. So, let us rise to the occasion, let us heed the warnings and do what we need to be doing. ♦