Sermon 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 Rev. Jin Hur

Regarding the times and the seasons, the Apostle Paul felt no need to address the Thessalonica church, since he believed they knew about the times and seasons and understood well that the day of the Lord would arrive like a thief in the night. My question is whether we already know this truth clearly, that all of us already recognize well the times and seasons, and understand well that the day of the Lord would arrive like a thief suddenly, unpredictably, and unexpectedly. Do you fully understand what the times and the seasons mean in your spiritual journey? If you say yes, I will finish my sermon now; instead, if you believe we need more insight about the times and the seasons, I will keep preaching.

Normally, time means hour, moment, while, age, era, or period. Season means each of the four divisions of the year, at the proper time, or a specific time like Season's Greetings. According to biblical dictionaries, however, the word *times* comes from χρόνος—chronos, which means time, duration, time in general, any time, that is to say in the abstract, time as measured by the succession of objects and events. On the other hand, *seasons* come from καιρός—kairos, which means the right measure and relation, especially as regards time and place; hence, the right time, suitable or convenient time; the opportune point of time at which a thing should be done. Also, in Greek, ἡμέρα—hemera, is another term of time. It means day, that is to say the time from one sunrise or sunset to another; also, day, that is to say day-light from sunrise to sunset; then, sometimes, time in general.

Apostle Paul used these three terms—time, season, and day—in verses 1 and 2—*"Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."* Paul then attempted to clarify their meanings. Paul wanted to urge people about apocalyptic hope. It doesn't matter when- a specific date- the Lord comes again, but he emphasized that we have to be ready to accept it.
He expressed, *"For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape!"—1 Thessalonians 5:2-3*

In Jewish tradition and culture, especially in the time of the Old Testament, the day of the Lord is a time of judgment that can feel a bit overwhelming. This sense of concern comes from taking Zephaniah's warning seriously. *"The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation,*

a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness."—Zephaniah 1:14-15 ESV

Thus, Paul, as a Jew, believed he should urge people to prepare to receive the day of the Lord. What if the day of the Lord arrives like a thief in the night—how should we respond now? What if, just as we're enjoying a sense of calm and safety for ourselves and our loved ones, something unexpected comes our way? Are you ready for the day of the Lord? I do not wish to threaten you or disturb your peaceful life. I simply invite you to reflect thoughtfully on our spiritual journey as the Church and as disciples of Jesus in this significant time. What is your focus this time—Sunday worship on November 15th, a season like the Stewardship Campaign or the approaching Advent and Christmas period, the post-election season in America, or a time of uncertainty and anxiety such as the Microsoft outage and the four-hour closure of all American airports? What significance do the times and seasons hold for you in the present and in this season?

Today's scripture teaches us that staying awake and being ready remain consistently important. As you know, I have three sons. I clearly remember that before their birth each time, I had already packed a bag for my stuffs, including my snacks, for a hospital stay of several days. Because several friends who had already given birth advised me to prepare as early as possible during the final month of pregnancy, I could not foresee when labor might start. Staying alert and being ready is always a better choice than just sitting back.

People already recognize that the day, as the special season of our lives, will come like a thief in the night, accidentally. We have heard many stories from the Bible, such as Noah's story and the tale of Sodom and Gomorrah, and from our friends. The day of the Lord will arrive like the first signs of labor for a mother—sudden and unavoidable. Yet many, including me, still claim I must eat fine foods, purchase good houses, and invite guests to my feast to celebrate my joyful days in my time, in my life. Yes, we should enjoy our lives. I am not threatening you or advising against such fun activities, but I would remind you how we prepare for the day now. I am not suggesting we must be selfish to be ready for our future hard times or economic inflation. Instead, I am curious how closely we are walking with Jesus in everyday life to awaken ourselves and prepare for the Lord's day.

Thankfully, beloved children of God, Centennial family of faith, here is good news for us today. I expect this Paul's statement to carry weight for us as well. "*But you, siblings in Christ, are not in darkness, for that day—ἡμέρα—to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness."—1 Thessalonians 5:4-5*

Paul contrasts darkness and light, night and day. Typically, a thief's business hours are at night, though not always or every moment. Night is the time of darkness. However, we belong to the light; we are not affected by the day of judgment. This is why Paul proclaimed that the Church—those who belong to Jesus Christ—is a family of the day and children of light, not of darkness or night. In the Old Testament, from the Israelites' perspective, people recognized two eras: the present age as darkness and a future age as brightness, since they expected the Messiah to bring eternal salvation. They had waited a long time for the Messiah to deliver them from all kinds of oppression. Then, Jesus finally arrived and proclaimed the new age as the kin-dom of God. His followers were certain he was the Messiah they had awaited. Consequently, they held a firm conviction that the time, called καιρός—kairos, the time of the Lord, had begun. Therefore, Apostle Paul urged Thessalonica church two thousand years ago, and today's passage is still urging us today that we have to wake up and be ready to the day of the Lord.

Let us remember we belong to the light and no longer dwell in darkness. We should awaken and prepare for complete salvation in Christ. We cannot know when God calls us into eternal life. We do not know when the season, καιρός—kairos, will come to us. "*So, then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober, for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation."—1 Thessalonians 5:6-8*

Paul's suggestion is clear: we should stay alert and sober, wearing the breastplate of faith and love, and the helmet of hope for salvation. Our tasks involve translating these metaphors and applying them to our lives. This forms our faith journey, an ongoing process of sanctification toward complete salvation, personal piety, and social holiness. Let us keep reminding ourselves of three dimensions: faith, love, and hope. What forms our breastplate of faith and love, and our helmet of hope for salvation? I believe that as the Church and followers of Jesus, our efforts—whether any involving good works, mission and ministry participation, or dedication to supporting the ministry and mission teams—serve as a strong breastplate of faith and love. Let us continue to dream for future generations. Let us lift young people to the Lord with persistent prayer and blessings. And let us keep worshiping God with hope that we will meet our Lord when called into everlasting peace. This would be our hope for salvation because we are the children of light. "…for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true, and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord." —Ephesians 5:8-10

We continue to consider what pleases God this season. I firmly believe one of the greatest ways to please God is by practicing our faith with rejoicing, prayer, and giving thanks. For doing these practices, let us keep encouraging one another and keep building up each other as the Centennial family of faith, hope, and love. This is the will of God for us today. "*Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing."—1 Thessalonians 5:11*

The methods for encouraging and strengthening one another vary within our practical daily lives. Let us keep reflecting on God's will and how we practice faith to please God during this season of gratitude. I am deeply thankful to observe many faithful and humble people of God among Centennial families. Thank you for your service, dedication, and special sacrifices for the Kin-dom of God. I hope and pray that this season of thanksgiving and the most wonderful time of the year—Advent and Christmas—will bring us genuine hope, peace, joy, and love to celebrate Jesus, our Lord's birth, life, message, and resurrection to save all creatures. Let us awaken and prepare to accept God's invitation, carrying God's hope, joy, and love into daily life through volunteering, involvement, participation, and commitment to the church's ministry and the kin-dom of God. Praise the Lord! Thanks be to God! Amen!