



1 Thessalonians: *Living in Light of Christ's Return*

Part 6: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Introduction

Last week, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, we looked at the question that *MUST* be answered. The question that was burning a hole in the soul of the Thessalonian believers. That question of course was, "What happens to believers who die before Christ's return? Will they miss his coming?" And we saw that the answer to this question was, "Certainly not! They will be the first to see the Lord!" Well, today we look at another question that Paul addresses...

The question that *CANNOT* be answered

And of course, a quick read through this section of God's Word shows us that the question that cannot be answered is... *When will Christ return?* So let's look at the first two verses of our passage...

❖ 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2

What we see here in these verses is they already knew the answer to this question. While Paul apparently didn't have time during his short stay in Thessalonica to teach them about what happens to those who die in Christ (we saw that in last week's text), he apparently did have time to teach them that the return of the Lord would come at a date and time that know one knows. No doubt he taught them the very words of Christ recorded in Matthew's gospel which says...

❖ Matthew 24:36—*But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.*

Now, having reiterated the fact that the Lord's return will come at an hour that no one knows, Paul then goes on to speak of two things. He speaks of...

- What Christ's return means for the unbeliever
- What Christ's return means for the believer

What Christ's return means for the unbeliever

As we look at this particular point I want us to notice three things in our text. To the unbeliever the Lord's return will be *certain, sudden, and it will mean eternal destruction*. Let's see first that...

1. It is certain

We see this of course in...

❖ 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3—*For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord **will come** like a thief in the night. 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**.*



1 Thessalonians: *Living in Light of Christ's Return*

Part 6: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Three times in these two short verses Paul stresses the point that the Lord's coming is NOT something that can be put off or avoided. It will happen.

Second, not only is the Lord's return certain, but...

2. It will be sudden

Paul illustrates this in three ways. First he says, "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." And of course anyone who has ever been broken into knows that the robber doesn't usually send you a card in the mail saying, "Just thought I'd let you know, I'll be coming by next Tuesday evening to take all your stuff. Expect me around 3am or so. Love, your thief."

The second way Paul illustrates this point is by saying, "While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them." And in this illustration we see just how very arrogant we humans are by nature. We tend to assume that we are the almighty, unstoppable, immovable, undefinable force in the universe. If you don't believe me, watch a sci-fi movie and you'll see what I mean. Giant asteroid coming to wipe us off the planet? No problem, we can conquer that says Bruce Willis and Liv Tyler! Aggressive alien species threatening to take over the world? Take your pic between Will Smith movies Independence Day or the Men In Black Trilogy. You get the idea right? This is the world's dangerously false assumption. You see, the world so desperately needs to know that we are NOT the almighty, unstoppable, immovable, undefinable force in the universe...GOD IS! And one day soon, while the world is planning their next sci-fi movie to depict humanity's invincibility, the Lord Jesus will return in power and glory.

And the third analogy that Paul uses to describe the suddenness of Christ's return is one that many of our ladies are all too familiar with...the on set of labor. You see while technology has been able to do amazing things on the field of obstetric medicine, things like show us 3-D images of our babies even while they are still in the womb. We can measure the size of our baby's head, hands, the length of it's spine. We can do so much these days, yet one thing still alludes us. Even still, we are unable to predict precisely when the baby will come. Oh sure, we have estimated "due dates," but ladies, isn't it true that unless you schedule a C-section or need to be induced, the only one who knows precisely when that baby is going to come is God himself? So it is with Christ's return.

Finally, for the unbeliever, not only is the Lord's return certain, and sudden, but we also see that

3. It will mean eternal destruction

We see this of course in...

❖ *1 Thessalonians 5:3*

This text is not too unlike something that he says at the beginning of his second letter to the Thessalonians...



1 Thessalonians: *Living in Light of Christ's Return*

Part 6: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

- ❖ 2 Thessalonians 1:7b-9—*when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,*

Having read these words I, want us to take a moment to understand two things about the destruction that is to come upon unbelievers. The first thing I want us to understand is that the destruction is going to be horrible. You see, many people have a really messed up understanding of what Hell will be like. Unfortunately, many derive their doctrine of Hell from AC/DC who says,

*"Ain't nothin' that I'd rather do
goin' down
party time
my friends are gonna be there too
I'm on the highway to hell"*

But, beloved, the Bible shows us that nothing could be farther from the truth. One of the most horrifying descriptions of hell is found in Zechariah 14 which says...

- ❖ Zechariah 14:12—*And this shall be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.*

Thus, clearly showing that hell is not a place where unbelievers go to drink beer, watch demon football, and hang out with their buddies. It's a real and horrible place of torment and pain.

The second thing I want us to understand is that the destruction to come is eternal. You see, a couple of years ago a wildly popular American pastor made a ton of money selling a book that argues that there is NO such place as Hell. He argues, in the final analysis, God is love and love wins...so there is no Hell. Now, since this argument is absolutely unsupportable when you read your Bible. Others have clung to the more subtle position that Hell is a euphemism for annihilation. In other words, it's not as if people will be punished on and on for all eternity, they'll simply be annihilated or wiped from existence. But make no mistake beloved, Hell is real, and it is indeed eternal punishment. Jesus himself teaches this as he says...

- ❖ Matthew 25:46—*And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*

And we see this same truth repeated over and over again in New Testament passages. In fact, in Revelation 14, it says the following about unbelievers...

- ❖ Revelation 14:10-11—*he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up **forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night,***



1 Thessalonians: *Living in Light of Christ's Return*

Part 6: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

◆ Now, at this point, if you're thinking to yourself, this is awful, why are we talking about this? Let me answer by saying that we are talking about this because we need to understand that this is the current future for an incredible number of people around us. And as believers, knowing that the Lord's return is certain, and knowing that the Lord's return will come at any moment, and knowing too that the judgement will be horrible and eternal for non-Christians, **WE MUST PREACH THE GOSPEL WITH THE GREATEST SENSE OF URGENCY!** You see only one truth is powerful enough to deliver people from this most horrible fate, and you and I know that truth don't we? Is it not the GOSPEL? Share it beloved! Share it as if the lives of people around you depend on it, because **IT DOES!!!!** Share it truthfully and share it in love! I understand that many will reject the gospel, I totally get that some might even mock you and call you names, but for the sake of their souls, endure the rejection and the ridicule and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them.

What Christ's return means for the believer

Now, obviously, it is still the case for believers that the Lord's return is certain. And it is also still the case that the Lord's return will be sudden. Yet, Paul goes on to say that the Lord's return will be a very different experience for the believer. He states two ways in which this is true. The first of these is

1. The suddenness of the Lord's return will not be a terror to us because we will be prepared

And Paul states in verses 4-5 the reason for our preparedness as he says...

❖ *1 Thessalonians 5:4-5*

These verses speak to our identity don't they? You see God's Word describes the world's identity by calling the children of darkness, in fact, Jesus once said...

❖ John 8:44—*You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.*

But for those of us who have been united to Christ by the grace of God, by faith that is not of ourselves, but a gift from God, God's Word says of us...

❖ Ephesians 5:8—*for at one time you were darkness, **but** now you are light in the Lord.*

And because we are children of light, Paul goes on to tell us that we ought to live like children of light...

❖ *1 Thessalonians 5:6-8*

Now, if we're going to understand what Paul is saying here, we need to ask the question, "What does Paul mean by sleep?" Is Paul encouraging us all to O.D. on caffeine pills? Would Paul have bought stock in companies like Red Bull and 5 Hour Energy? No, literal, physical sleep is not at all what he's



1 Thessalonians: *Living in Light of Christ's Return*

Part 6: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

speaking to is it? Paul is simply using a figure of speech to say, don't let the Lord's return catch you by surprise, stay alert! Be ready! Be like a faithful soldier at his post, one who doesn't snooze on his watch. Be ready at any moment for the Lord to return!" It is very similar to what the Lord Jesus says in...

- ❖ Luke 12:35-37—*Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes.*

Now of course, this really does beg the question, what exactly does that mean? Doesn't it? I mean practically speaking, what are the Thessalonians supposed to do to be ready? Practically speaking, what are the Thessalonians supposed to do to "keep their lamps trimmed and burning?" And of course these questions apply to us as well don't they? What are we to do? Are we to go sit on the hill all day, everyday, looking for the Lord in the sky? Are we to read the newspaper everyday looking for signs or clues of his coming? No, our preparedness has nothing to do with being idle and staring at the sky and it has nothing to do with idle speculation either. In fact, I would go so far as to say that we really ought not have anything to do with either one of these things. They are an utter and total waste of time. So then, how do we prepare ourselves practically? In this passage Paul tells us that we prepare ourselves by "getting dressed spiritually." We are to put off the the deeds of sin and darkness and we are to be clothed by the Lord in the protective armor that he gives us. Here in verse 8, Paul speaks of faith and love being a protective breastplate, something that will guard our hearts against waywardness. You see the words of that old hymn are just so very true aren't they? On our own, don't each and every one of our hearts say, "prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love?" And what we see here in this passage is that the Lord dresses us, girds us in holy spiritual armor that protects our hearts from doing this. He loves us with a love that WILL NOT let go and grants us a faith that WILL NOT fail! Beloved we ARE safe in Christ! And this is not all that Paul speaks of us being dressed in here. The Lord not only protects our hearts from wandering, but he protects our mind as well. He gives to us as a helmet the hope of salvation. The thing that will guard and protect our mind in the very truth that when Jesus comes...

2. We will not experience destruction, but salvation

And this is the second way in which the return of Christ will be a very different experience for the believer. And we see this spelled out so clearly for us in the last few verses of our text...

❖ 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11

You see, while we have already seen in our study this morning that that hell is a very real, and horrible place. We see now that it is absolutely NOT what we have been destined for. And in saying this, we cannot miss this opportunity to gaze for just a moment at God's gloriously sovereign hand. You see, God is clearly than in charge of destiny according to verse 9 isn't he? And what this means is that our salvation, our deliverance, is NOT something that we have attained for ourselves. It is NOT something that we have earned for ourselves. Rather, it is what God has destined us for. You see Paul is making it clear that the faith that has saved us is...



1 Thessalonians: *Living in Light of Christ's Return*

Part 6: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

- ❖ Ephesians 2:8-9—*not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

Of course, Paul goes on to say more than just “This is what you aren’t destined for.” He goes on to tell us what the believer in Christ is destined for. What everyone in Christ, alive or dead, will experience at the Lord return. We who have been predestined unto salvation will attain what our souls most desperately long for! Christ himself! What he says here in verse 10 is so very much like what he says in...

- ❖ Romans 8:22-24—*For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.*

Do you hear what Paul is saying in this? The very soul of the believer which aches and “groans inwardly” will be utterly and eternally satisfied only when Christ returns! It is only then that these bodies, marred by sin and doomed to die, will be redeemed. It is only then that we will dwell fully and eternally with the one whose glory will fill us with eternal joy.

You see, in the upper room, when Jesus told his disciples that he was going to leave them, he gave them the worst news that they could ever imagine hearing. News that truly devastated their souls. And the only thing that could possibly comfort them in light of this news was what he said next...

- ❖ John 14:1-3—*“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will **take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.**”*

And this is our comfort too isn't it? This is our hope too isn't it? If you're being honest, don't you sometimes think it rather unfair that the disciples got to walk with Jesus and talk with Jesus in the flesh? Aren't you at least at times a little jealous over that? I know I am. And the great comfort to my jealous soul is that one day, I will get to see Jesus in the flesh. One day, I will have the opportunity to walk with Jesus and talk with Jesus. I can't tell you how jealous I am that the apostles got to see Jesus walk on water, feed the 5,000, heal countless sick people, and even raise Lazarus from the grave! Yet, the truth is, one day, we will get to watch the Lord Jesus raise the dead won't we? You see, when Jesus returns we will be forever with him and we will never cease to be amazed by his wonders and his glory and his goodness. And this is precisely why, I think, that Paul ends this section of our text by saying...

- ❖ 1 Thessalonians 5:11—*Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*

The Lord's return is in this sense, the very source of our hope. And the promise of his return is the very source of our encouragement. So I join with Paul in saying, let be faithful to encourage one another with this truth. When sin seems to be getting the better of us, let us encourage and exhort one another to walk in holiness in light of the return of our holy King! When life seems to beat us down and rob us of all joy, let us encourage one another that infinite, eternal joy is to be found in our savior who is coming soon! Let's pray.



1 Thessalonians: *Living in Light of Christ's Return*

Part 6: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Questions for small group discussion

- From the group
 1. Discuss one thing that you didn't fully understand/wish to get more clarity on
 2. Discuss one area of application that was particularly significant to you
- For the group
 1. In this weeks text, Paul began by answering the question that cannot be answered. What was that question? What was the answer?
 2. In the next section, Paul describes what the return of Christ will mean for the unbeliever. What 3 things does Paul say about this? (Certain, Sudden, and Destructive). What ought this motivate us to do?
 3. In the final portion of our text, Paul describes what the return of Christ will be like for the believer. How will the believer's experience differ from the unbeliever's?