

072: Like a Thief in the Night
Andrew Kneeland, November 15, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We're going to be looking at 1 Thessalonians 5 this morning, so take out your Bibles if you have them, or turn in your bulletin to the second reading. 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 1-11.

And before we get started, it's important to know that we're not just looking at words on a sheet. You're not just listening to some random person's opinions. It might look like it, but what we're actually doing here this morning is listening to the voice of God. That's what this is.

God promises to work through His Word, so we know He WILL work through His Word this morning. Isn't that cool? So we approach this Word... these words... with expectancy. We can EXCEPT things to happen. Hearts to be convicted...and faith to be grown.

Let's pray: Father God, this is Your Word and this is Your Truth. Convict us of sin this morning where needed, and comfort us with your precious Gospel. In your name we pray, amen.

Someday, there won't be a tomorrow. Have you ever thought about that? Someday... maybe someday very soon... there won't be a tomorrow.

Paul is talking here in this letter to the Thessalonians about the Second Coming of Christ. The Last Day. He is warning them about how and when Christ will come again to judge the living and dead... and he says that this Second Coming of Christ will be unexpected.

Someday there won't be a tomorrow. We are living in the Last Days, and one of these days will be THE last day. Maybe Christ will return tomorrow. Maybe before the year is out. Maybe longer. No one knows the time or the hour, only the Father.

But it will be UNEXPECTED, and it will also be SUDDEN. Christ's Return won't show up in the five-day forecast. There won't be a notice in your mailbox to update your forwarding address, to get your affairs in order. THIS is the warning, right here. This Word that we're reading today. Christ's return will be unexpected and sudden.

Under false illusions of peace and security... Christ will come again. While leaders talk about world peace and global prosperity... Christ will come again. When the world least expects it...

Christ will come again.

And verse three says, ominously, “And there will be no escape.” That kind of makes your hair stand on end, doesn’t it? Gives you a little chill. “And there will be no escape.” Those ARE terrifying words... to those who SHOULD BE afraid.

Maybe you have reason to be afraid of God’s judgment, afraid of Christ’s Second Coming. Maybe the most important thing in your life is... YOU. Maybe you care more about your savings account than your spiritual health. Maybe you care more about the praise and opinions of others than you care about what God says about you.

Maybe you SHOULD be afraid that there will be no escaping Christ’s return. Maybe you SHOULD be afraid that you won’t be able to simply change the channel... or pull the covers over your head and wait for it to be over.

When Christ returns... there will be no escape. Maybe you should be afraid of those words today.

But, friends, to those of us who trust in Jesus, these words in verse three are beautiful. Think about it! When Christ returns there will be no escape! When Christ comes to gather His flock to Himself and take his people to paradise for eternity... there will be no escape! Nothing will be able to prevent God from gathering His children.

Nothing! Romans 8 says: “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

When the Last Day is upon us... there will be no escaping from Christ’s Return. We won’t be able to miss it; we don’t need to be in a certain place, or doing a certain thing, or have checked off a certain list. There will be no escape. And praise God for that.

Paul then in verse four starts talking about DAY and NIGHT. About LIGHT and DARKNESS. He says we who believe are Children of the Light, and we live in the Day. We see what’s happening clearly, and we know what’s about to happen. Those who don’t believe -- those who should be afraid of Christ’s sudden and unexpected return -- they are sleeping and they live in the DARK.

So we have two instructions here in this section, on how to live as we wait for this Day of the

Lord to come like a thief in the night. Paul tells us to BE ON OUR GUARD and he tells us to BE PROTECTED.

Look again at verses 5-6: *“For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don’t belong to darkness and night. So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clear headed.”*

Anyone remember who Dale Earnhardt was? What sport was he in? Nascar!

Dale Earnhardt is one of the most famous Nascar drivers of all time. Seven-time champion, he was one of the best. He was so good, he was known to often take naps before his races. While everyone else’s heart would be pounding in nervousness and anxiety before a big race, Dale Earnhardt would often be sleeping.

But he took that to a whole new level in August of 1997 at a race in South Carolina. He napped before the race, like he often did. But then he also fell asleep at the wheel. He hit two walls on the first lap, then somehow drove two more laps before managing to find his crew.

Sixteen doctors evaluated the famous driver and no one was sure what happened. Did a blood vessel spasm? Did he have some rare blood flow syndrome? Or did he just fall asleep at the wheel?

Either way, it’s pretty scary to think about driving a car over a hundred miles an hour... while being asleep. Isn’t it? But that’s kind of what Paul is talking about here in 1 Thessalonians! How many people around us are going through life at a hundred miles an hour -- going to work, getting the groceries, getting the dry cleaning, finishing that project, watching the news, worrying about the news, taking the kids to their appointments, running their errands -- rushing through life at a hundred miles an hour... but sleeping at the wheel?

Going a hundred miles an hour... but sleeping. Living in the darkness, living in the night. Not able to see their sin, not aware of the danger they’re hurtling towards. If your eyes are closed you don’t see your sinfulness. You don’t see your glaring and obvious NEED to be rescued. And if Christ comes this afternoon, while you’re racing through life with your spiritual eyes closed, you will spend the rest of eternity in burning misery and unrelenting agony.

People living in the darkness will get what they deserve. People who live in the light will get

what they DON'T deserve. We see our sin, we confess our sin, and are forgiven. Christ is coming again soon, and Paul tells us to BE ON GUARD.

That means to be awake! To be aware of our sins and our failings and our shortcomings... to have our eyes OPEN to know what's coming, and what's truly important. BE ON GUARD and BE ALERT. When we know what's coming... when we know that Christ will return soon -- like a thief in the night -- suddenly many of our problems don't seem very important anymore, do they?

When we know that our salvation is in God's hands and he's coming again soon to claim us and take us with Him to the heavenly mansions He's been preparing for us... when we know that, suddenly those problems with your neighbor don't matter as much. Suddenly the news doesn't seem as dire as it might have before.

BE ON YOUR GUARD. Be alert, be aware. Keep your eyes peeled for Jesus, because He's coming soon. It's only when your gaze is fixed upwards that your feet can be firmly planted here on earth.

Because our time here on earth DOES matter. We aren't to spend our days ignoring our neighbors, neglecting our responsibilities... just waiting for the Second Coming of Christ. We are to LIVE OUR LIVES, alert and aware of what's about to happen, but also armored and equipped with our God-given protection.

Paul says we are to BE ON GUARD and also to BE ARMORED. Look at verse 8: *"But let us who live in the light be clear headed, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation."*

It's only when we have this armor on that we're prepared to face the evils of the world. We aren't called to ignore the world... we aren't supposed to live with our heads in the clouds, we ARE to care about this world. We ARE to fight for justice and righteousness, and to support and pray for those who fight and defend justice and righteousness.

With the armor given to us by God, we can stand in the world, resist the power and the evil that comes our way, and fight for what's right.

It's not easy! It's a tall, hard task. The news just keeps getting more discouraging, truth keeps

getting twisted and manipulated, injustice seems to be spreading like wildfire.

But we have the armor of God. This armor can stand against anything the devil or the world can throw at us. We have the faith that comes from God, we have the love that comes from God, and we have the ASSURANCE -- the CONFIDENCE -- that also comes from God.

What are we confident about? Look at verse nine. Let's actually read it together out loud. Verse nine:

"For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us."

It's so tempting for us, isn't it, to assume that when bad things happen, we did something to deserve it.

Sometimes it's true. When we do something stupid, like, I don't know, eat nine microwave burritos before bed... there's going to be some consequences. If we don't pay our bills, or do our job well... there's going to be consequences.

But Paul says that God has chosen to save us... NOT to pour out his anger on us.

When bad things happen, it's not always because you brought it upon yourself. And it's certainly not God pouring out his anger on you; He's already poured His anger against your sin... but He poured it onto Jesus instead of onto you. So you can KNOW that when something bad happens to you, or to your family, or to our country... it's NOT the anger of God.

It's a sign of the times. It's a sign that Christ's Return is coming soon. And we'll only see more and more of these signs as the day of Christ's return gets closer.

But just think for a minute about that first phrase: "God chose to save us." How incredible is that? Don't just skip over that part, or ignore it. Think about how incredible that is. If you're believing in Jesus today you have been CHOSEN by God.

Ephesians 1 says: "God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will."

I don't know about you, but most of the time I don't feel very "holy" or "blameless." In fact I often feel very sinful and dirty. That's how I feel and it's often how I act. But it's not who I am. It's not

who God has chosen me to be.

We are the chosen children of God! God has CHOSEN to save us through Jesus Christ. In a few minutes we're going to participate together in Aaron's baptism. Maybe you've been a part of a baptism before. God has chosen Aaron to be saved, and it is in baptism where that saving faith is given. This isn't just an empty ritual or ceremony that we're about to do... it's infinitely important and cosmically significant.

Do you remember your baptism? That's where God gave you your faith, too! That's the point in time where God reached down and said, "This one belongs to me." And when you're safely in the loving and protective hand of your Heavenly Father, you have nothing to fear.

When Jesus comes again the people living in darkness will get what they deserve... but we will get what we DON'T deserve. We who have been chosen will receive eternal life in perfect paradise. Eternal life with no more pain, no more sickness, no more worn down and tired bodies, no more lies, no more disease, no more sin.

The Day of the Lord is coming... like a thief in the night. Suddenly and unexpectedly, one day Christ will return. We'll hear a loud trumpet sound... and we'll all see the physical body of our resurrected Lord. He will come again with judgment and with love.

He will judge severely those who have thwarted justice. Those who have trampled the poor, the needy, the widows, the orphans. He will judge those who are spiritually asleep. Those who are racing through life, worrying about their own problems and their own issues and not caring at all about spiritual things. Christ will judge the self-righteous; those who think they've done enough by themselves to earn God's favor. Who think they've accomplished enough or done enough good to out-weigh the infinite debt of sin they've accrued.

Jesus will come again soon -- like a thief in the night -- to put a sudden and glorious END to all injustice. To STOP all wrongdoing. To CURE all disease and all heartbreak and all tears and mourning.

Jesus is coming again soon to judge the living and the dead. To take away those of us who believe in Him and trust in Him for our forgiveness. To bring us with Him to perfect paradise.

And there will be no escape. Praise God. Amen.