

April 23, 2023

Living with Hope

Bible Background • 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13–5:11

Printed Text • 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13–5:11 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 38:9–5

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will UNDERSTAND the significance of the second coming of Christ, REJOICE in our salvation, and DETERMINE to be prepared for the return of our Lord.

In Focus

Marcus and Felicia always insisted that the house's alarm system be turned on each night when the family went to bed. When their two children, Alex and Katrina, became old enough to understand the responsibility, they taught them how to set the system. But one night, Alex and Katrina decided to stay up to watch a little TV after their parents had gone to bed, and Alex forgot to turn on the alarm.

Later that night, Alex was awakened by a sound in the house. He climbed out of bed, tiptoed into his parents' room, shook his dad and whispered, "Dad, someone is in the house!" Marcus pushed a nearby panic button wired to the alarm system. A blaring alarm sounded throughout the house. The intruder ran out the back door and a car was heard screeching away. The policeman told Marcus that in his experience, thieves never showed up when people were looking for them; they always came when they were least expected.

In today's lesson, Paul explained to the Thessalonian Christians that because the Day of the Lord would come as a thief in the night, they were to live as though they expected Christ to return at any moment.

Keep In Mind

"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9, KJV)

Words You Should Know

- A. **Times** (1 Thessalonians 5:1) *chronos* (Gk.) – A duration, which may be a point in time or a length of time.
- B. **Seasons** (v. 1b) *kairos* (Gk.) – An opportune, set, or appointed time.

Say It Correctly

Thessalonians. theh-suh-LO-nih-uhnz

KJV

1 Thessalonians 4:13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

5:1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

NLT

1 Thessalonians 4:13 And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope.

14 For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died.

15 We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died.

16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves.

17 Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever.

18 So encourage each other with these words.

5:1 Now concerning how and when all this will happen, dear brothers and sisters, we don't really need to write you.

2 For you know quite well that the day of the Lord's return will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night.

3 When people are saying, "Everything is peaceful and secure," then disaster will fall on them as suddenly as a pregnant woman's labor pains begin. And there will be no escape.

4 But you aren't in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won't be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief.

5 For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don't belong to darkness and night.

6 So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded.

7 Night is the time when people sleep and drinkers get drunk.

8 But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation.

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

10 Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever.

11 So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

The People, Places, and Times

The Day of the Lord. The Bible presents history as a process that will culminate in “the day of the Lord” and this current age as the final moment before the intended climax (1 Thessalonians 5:2). John saw principles of evil at work now that will be given full reign at the “last hour” (1 John 2:18, NLT). In the case of today’s passage, the purpose of “that day” is to bring about the end of human history and begin the reign of Christ.

Background

Paul rejoiced with great joy that the Thessalonians had received the Gospel as the truth of God through the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:5). He then showed how deeply the Gospel’s power is tied to those who proclaim and receive it, exclaiming, “So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls” (from 2:8). With this unbreakable Gospel-bond in mind, Paul spoke at length in chapter 3 about his longing to be reunited with the Thessalonian Christians. Since such a reunion had proven impossible, Paul reminded his hearers they had “sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister for God, and our fellow labourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith” (3:2).

At-A-Glance

1. Those Who Have Fallen Asleep (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18)
 2. The Day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:1–3)
 3. Children of Darkness vs. Children of Light (vv. 4–6)
 4. Walking in Readiness (vv. 7–11)

In Depth

1. Those Who Have Fallen Asleep (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18)

In this section, Paul corrected a misunderstanding about the return of Christ by the Thessalonian Christians. Apparently, at least some members of the Thessalonian church believed that only those Christians who were alive at the Second Coming would have the possibility of sharing in the kingdom of God at the time of Christ’s return.

Paul referred to the dead euphemistically as being “asleep” (4:14–15). The point he made is that they are not dead and gone; rather, their bodies are asleep awaiting the Lord’s call to get up. The apostle was anxious to assure the Thessalonians that once a person is saved, he or she is guaranteed to be present when Jesus comes again. Paul wanted to comfort his readers by assuring them that in his words, Christians who are still alive “shall not prevent them which are asleep” (v. 15).

Paul described Christ’s return to earth in a specific series of events (4:16). The Lord will descend from the heavens with a shout. The voice of the archangel and God’s trumpet call will be heard. Christians will rise out of their graves and ascend into the air to meet Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Only after those who “sleep in Christ” have left their graves will “we which are alive and remain” also ascend to meet Jesus in the air (vv. 16–17). Paul appeared to have believed that he and many other Christians alive at the time of his writing would still be alive when Christ returns. Those who have ascended to be with Jesus will be with Him for all eternity when He returns to establish the kingdom of God.

2. The Day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:1–3)

“The day of the Lord” (v. 2) is a term that Paul used to describe the period of judgment that culminates with the reign of Christ on earth. In His final teaching on the Mount of Olives, Jesus heard the disciples’ questions about this period (Matthew 24:3). Our Lord then described a coming period of history marked by universal suffering and destruction (see 24:4–31). During this period, God will pour out His wrath and judgment (Revelation 14:6–7; 15:1).

Like many believers attempt today, the Thessalonian Christians were looking at the events of their world and pointing to them as signs of the end times. Paul cautioned them by explaining, “The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:2). This metaphor illustrates that the Day of the Lord will begin when it is least expected. Rather than coming during a time of increasing trouble, Paul seemed to state that the time would occur when people are expecting “peace and safety” (v. 3). There would be calm before the storm. The unsaved world will be enjoying a period of peace and well-being. Paul compared it to a pregnant woman who anticipates a specific day of delivery, but then suddenly her water breaks and labor pains begin. The prophet Isaiah used the same illustration years earlier when he described the coming Day of the Lord (Isaiah 13:6–8).

3. Children of Darkness vs. Children of Light (vv. 4–6)

Notice here that Paul was careful to point out the difference between the unbelieving world and true believers (1 Thessalonians 5:3). Paul described the unbelieving world as living in darkness; believers as “children of the light” (v. 5). And “children of the day,” i.e., believers, are not in the dark (unknowing, unable to perceive) when it comes to end-time events. We eagerly anticipate the return of Christ, and we live each day as though today will be the day. Unbelievers live as though they will never have to answer for their actions. Of them, Peter wrote: “There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying Where is the promise of his coming? for since the father fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (from 2 Peter 3:3–4).

Unlike those who are in darkness, “the children of the day” are awake, sensitive, alert, and prepared for that great and terrible day. Paul warned us that we must not allow anything in our lives that will deaden our moral alertness. When we allow sin in our lives, we soon are so overcome by its effects that we become oblivious to spiritual matters and unconcerned about the imminent return of Christ.

4. Walking in Readiness (vv. 7–11)

In contrast to 1 Thessalonians 5:7, Paul sets up imagery of a soldier commanded to stay alert on his post. We should do the same as Christians. Paul instructed us to put on our Christian armor and prepare for combat. First, we put on the “breastplate of faith and love” (v. 8). The breastplate, a metal piece worn defensively, is to guard our hearts. Believers must not allow the world’s situations to become issues that affect our hearts. No matter what the world throws at us, be it trouble, persecution, hardship, or even the threat of death; we are more than conquerors through Christ who loves us (see Romans 8:35–37).

Next, we put on the “helmet, the hope of salvation” or better yet, hope in our salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:8). Our hope is in Christ and His promise to never leave nor forsake us. People, institutions, and organizations all fail; but the salvation of Christ is guaranteed for eternity. God has not chosen His people “to (suffer) wrath, but to obtain salvation” through Christ who died to redeem us from God’s wrath (vv. 9–10).

Search the Scriptures

1. What is the term Paul used to describe the period culminating in the return of Christ to rule and reign on the earth (1 Thessalonians 5:2)?
2. When this terrible period came upon them, what would people be expecting for the world (v. 2)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Explain the difference between those who are asleep in 1 Thessalonians 5:4 and verse 11.

Liberating Lesson

People are worried about the economy, wars, terrorism, and the general state of the world. How would you comfort someone stressed over these issues?

Application for Activation

This week, ask a couple of non-believers what they consider to be the biggest worries of the country. Then ask them how these issues affect them and their future. Use the response as a means of offering them the assurance of Christ.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11

13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

The subject of these verses is the coming of the Lord. The Greek word for “coming” is parousia (par-oo-SEE-ah), and Christians have adopted this word to refer to the Second Coming of our Lord. The Thessalonians were enthusiastically anticipating the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. They expected Jesus to come any day. Yet when some died before He returned, the Thessalonians wondered what

would happen to them. They considered the return of Jesus in all His glory to be something that their departed brothers and sisters would not want to miss. So this is one issue that Paul is dealing with in the epistle to the Thessalonians.

What happens to any Christian when he or she dies? We have to look at a variety of scriptural sources to get the whole picture. When we die, our physical bodies remain in the earth, slowly decaying away. But our spirits go immediately to be with the Lord. Second Corinthians 5:1-9 assures us that when we are absent from our bodies, we are present with the Lord. And yet, the passage under discussion speaks of being “dead in Christ,” (v.16). Therefore, in God’s unsearchable wisdom, there is a sense in which our bodies wait for His return and we are also immediately in His presence.

But that was not the question of the people in the church at Thessalonica. They wanted to know if those who died before the Lord would miss out on that glorious event. The answer here is no. If we have already died, God will raise up our bodies into glorified bodies and take us along with Jesus as He returns for all the Christians on the earth.

Although “sleep” in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–15 gives us the peaceful idea of sleeping in death, going to be with Jesus will be the most exciting time we have ever had. We will be face to face with Jesus, and we will see Him more fully than ever before (1 Corinthians 13:12).

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Jesus also spoke about this time in Matthew 24:30–31, “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” In 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the Greek word for “meet” is *apantesis* (ap-AN-tay-sis) and it also means “encounter.” When Christ comes, He will meet His people in the same way as a victorious general would arrive after a battle. The citizens of God’s Kingdom will meet their King who has come to establish God’s reign in fullness.

5:1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

Paul thoroughly versed the Thessalonians in the words of Jesus—words like, “Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 24:44). The Thessalonians needed only to be reminded about Jesus’ sudden and unexpected coming. The other reason Paul expected the Thessalonians to know what is to come is that, in this very letter, he had just proclaimed to them again the glorious future with Christ that awaited them.

2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

In two other places (2:1 and 3:3), as in this verse, Paul added the Greek word *heoutou* (hehow-TOO), meaning “yourselves,” to emphasize how the Thessalonians’ recollection of this aspect of the Gospel. Here, like no other place in all his writings, Paul employed the Greek word *akribos* (ak-ree-BOCE), meaning “perfectly,” “exactly,” or “accurately.” Because Paul had been repeatedly responding to Thessalonian questions throughout this letter (see 4:9 and 4:13), we can reasonably conclude that he

used this word here because of his stated desire for them to “not grieve like people who have no hope” of when Christ would return (4:13, NIV). He followed up by saying, in effect, “You want to know accurately when Jesus will return? The only thing you can know for certain is that you can’t know the time or season at all!” If the end comes “like a thief in the night,” then what use is there in predicting its coming?

In talking about this anticipated day, Paul used the language of the parable found in Luke 12:39 and Matthew 24:43, but he connected the “thief ” not with Jesus directly but with “the day of the Lord.” This idea of the “Day of the Lord,” refers to more than one event—often even more than one event at once. This “day” was greatly anticipated by God’s people, Israel, for it held the promise that He would rescue them by destroying any and all enemies threatening to destroy them. But the prophets before the exile turned the phrase around so that on that day, God would judge His own people for covenant breaking. This “day” came about in 722 B.C. for the Northern Kingdom and 586 B.C. for the Southern Kingdom. The Day of the Lord has many echoes, but only one fulfillment. So it is fitting that Paul, like Peter, joined together the awesome and terrible Day of the Lord with the long-awaited second coming of Christ (2 Peter 3:10).

3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

Paul now directed the Thessalonians to turn their gaze toward the fate of a perishing world. “Paul’s readers in Thessalonica ... would take his words as an attack on claims of earlier Roman emperors to have established peace and security (*pax et securitas*) throughout the empire. Teachings like this one sounded subversive and may have aroused persecution against Christians (Acts 17:7)” (IVP Background Bible Commentary, 594). This is not to say that Paul saw only emperors being undone by the Day of the Lord; the pronoun “they,” without identification, suggests a much larger scope for his prophecy. But the picture of the Roman emperor—who exalted himself, in Paul’s day, as lord and savior—would have called to mind anyone, Gentile or Jew, who would rest in their own complacency.

Paul’s vision here brought a revolution to the Thessalonians’ thinking about the end: Don’t speculate about the day or the hour; rather, think on your standing and that of the fallen world around you, knowing Christ will come as a reigning King.

4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

The first two words of this verse, though tiny in both English and the original Greek, exert a huge influence on the verse’s meaning. The mood of the whole passage turns on the word “but” with which Paul now sets up a contrast between “they” (v. 3) and “ye” (v. 4). The Thessalonians should not respond to the promise of the King’s coming with terror, but with joy and anticipation, as 4:13–18 clearly shows. The Greek word *humeis* (hoo-MICE), translated as “ye”, is placed in an emphatic position at the very front of the Greek sentence. This emphasizes the extreme separation between “they” and “ye” in the mind of God.

5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

We now learn further why the believer in Christ can and should welcome the day of Christ’s Second Coming: their identity is forever tied to the brightness of the day and not the slumber of the night. By using the phrase “children of ” to describe his hearers’ relationship to “light” and “day,” Paul employs a common New Testament phrase to express an unmistakable quality about a person.

The meaning of “day” changes from verse 4 to verse 5. The context demonstrates that Paul did not mean to say that his hearers “belong to the day of the Lord.” Rather, they “belong to the day,” not the

night; they belong to the light, not the darkness (v. 5, GNT). The Thessalonians became part of this life-giving “day” through faith in the Gospel of Christ.

6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

Many have accused both the Bible and sound Christian teaching of becoming a motivation for laziness and complacency. After all, if our destiny as “children of light” is so secure, what motivation could we possibly have to live lives full of holiness and love? But this way of thinking to the biblical authors. They saw the possession of Christ’s glorious riches as nothing less than a call to action. This is why Paul began his charge to the Thessalonians in verses 6–8 with the connector “therefore.” The Christians’ calling here lines up with their identity. If they are surrounded by the day and full of the light of Christ, then it makes no sense for them to sleep as if it were nighttime. Paul made it clear that there are “others” who sleep; those who have not believed the revelation of Jesus in the Gospel are truly asleep with regard to the coming Day of the Lord. However, it would be unnatural for those of the day to doze as if they could count on “peace and safety” apart from the love and mercy of Christ.

7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

The people described in this verse were doing the opposite of “watching” and “being sober.” By reminding the Thessalonians of such people, Paul strengthened his appeal that they follow a different course in light of their beautifully distinct identity. It is important to keep our focus on the context of these commands, which is the hope-filled promise of Christ’s return. You might say that the reigning Jesus will have one return, but that coming will be received in two different ways. The appearing will be gloriously happy to those who are watching on that day. The appearing will be a terror-filled surprise to those sleeping.

8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

Paul now included himself (“us”) in his continuing call to resist the stupor of the night. Paul used military terms that would be understood both by those in Roman occupied territory, who frequently saw centurions and other soldiers arrayed for battle. Paul spoke of a “breastplate” and “helmet,” but we quickly see that these are no ordinary, literal war-related gear.

Paul referred to “the hope of salvation” as the believer’s helmet. What Paul seemed to be doing here is taking Old Testament language and applying it to New Testament Christians in light of the full revelation of God in Christ. God’s righteousness is worked out in faith and love and it brings hope! Thus, the believer’s armor expresses the result of God’s “battle” on our behalf.

Exercising faith in the Gospel of God, expressing love toward others, and maintaining a joyous hope are all results from someone who possesses Christ. And of course, the command regarding “putting on” these things implies that believers have such items in their wardrobe— which indeed they do— because they possess the riches of Christ.

9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

The next two verses showed the heart of God’s redemption for believers in Christ, and the reason that Paul could urge the Thessalonians to put on the armor of the light. Indeed, we “trace our salvation to the first cause, that is God’s appointment. Those who live and die in darkness and ignorance, who sleep and are drunken as in the night, are, it is but too plain, appointed to wrath (God’s punishment); but as for those who are of the day, if they watch and be sober, it is evident that they are appointed to obtain salvation” (Matthew Henry, 788). Thus, God’s amazing mercy is the subject of 1 Thessalonians

5:9. Paul mentioned “wrath” because, among other things (for example death, sin, and hell), this is exactly the thing from which the Thessalonians have been saved. They are saved not just through God’s intention (“destined”) but also through God’s action (“through our Lord Jesus Christ”). His atoning work on the Cross is what delivers salvation to those who are His, and gives them the hope to press on in their high and holy calling.

10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

Paul now reinforced Christians’ hope in their ultimate destiny by explaining the loving purpose and happy result of Jesus’ death in the place of His people. The words “wake or sleep” might bring some confusion. After all, has not Paul said that those who are “asleep” when Jesus comes back will find themselves in darkness and not in the light of His merciful presence? Indeed, if the word “sleep” here referred to such people, then the Apostle would have contradicted himself. But Paul was actually looking back to an earlier use of the word “sleep” (found in 4:13–18) meaning “dead.” We know this because he was building on the words of 5:9. Paul does not link Jesus’ death with anyone’s destruction. Jesus’ death was only for redemption. Paul is again encouraging the Thessalonian believers with the knowledge that both they and their deceased loved ones, who had died, will be with the Lord. When will they “come to life”? It will be at the promised resurrection of all people, at the coming of Christ “like a thief,” as both 4:13–18 and our passage show.

11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

Paul reminded the Thessalonians that the uplifting truths of the Gospel are never just for their own encouragement. A major part of “watching” for the Lord’s Second Coming to come is sharing with one another the hope and glory brought about by His first coming—His incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension on our behalf.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

The Hopeless Human Situation
(Isaiah 59:9–15a)

TUESDAY

The Source of Hope
(Isaiah 59:15b–21)

WEDNESDAY

Waiting in Hope
(Psalm 38:9–15)

THURSDAY

Hoping against Hope
(Romans 4:16–25)

FRIDAY

Seizing the Hope Set before Us
(Hebrews 6:13–20)

SATURDAY

The God of Hope
(Romans 15:7–13)

SUNDAY

Encourage One Another with Hope
(1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11)