

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11: Eschatology 101

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[0 : 00] on today is from 1st Thessalonians chapter 5 verses 1 through 11. The Pew Bibles, read Pew Bibles, you'll find that on page 960, 960 in the Pew Bibles.

1st Thessalonians chapter 5 verses 1 through 11. Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you, 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's peace and safety, then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We're not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we might live with him.

Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up just as you are doing. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

What a privilege it is to be in God's house with God's people and God's presence on this afternoon. Thank you for the marvelous planning for worship and engagement of those who share their gifts with us on this afternoon.

[2 : 28] We praise God for you.

But one of the Christian doctrines that has been under fire for centuries is the doctrine of Christ's return.

And of course, that falls under the broader heading of eschatology, the doctrine that deals with last things, end time kinds of things.

Because scholars and scoffers have stumbled over these things for centuries. But we as Christians, we have embraced them, we have believed them from the beginning.

This is a part of our Christian heritage. Apostles' Creed that we recited on this afternoon includes it.

[3 : 47] It speaks of Christ's return to judge the living and the dead. The Nicene Creed that we've affirmed weekly, likewise, affirms that Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

We also use a liturgy during our Holy Communion service weekly. And in the context of that liturgy, both the leader and the people say together, Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

That's the teaching of the church. That's the teaching of Scripture. But people that you and I rub shoulders with on a daily basis, they remain unconvinced, some of them, of who Christ is, the Son of God, what Christ has done, died for our sins according to the Scripture, and the fact that Christ will return.

They just turn their noses up at that doctrine as they do other Christian doctrines that you and I hold near and dear and embrace and many of us willing to stake our lives on.

Paul's teaching in today's text amounts to a review of basic truths that surround the Lord's return, as well as the responsibilities that you and I have as those who have embraced those truths as being Christian doctrine.

[5 : 39] One of the titles that we might give to chapter 5, verses 1 through 11 is simply eschatology 101, because it is there that Paul gives us some very basic things.

He doesn't get into all the elaborate kinds of schemes that have resulted from this particular doctrine over the years. It's basic eschatology that concerns the basic facts of our Lord's return.

Four headers help us to put things in perspective on this afternoon. One day, you see that in verses 1 through 3, two descriptions in verses 4 through 8, two destinies in verses 9 and 10, and then two duties in verse 11.

One day, two descriptions, two destinies, and two duties. Look at the text with me.

I'm going to read verses 1 and 2. Then we'll get into what the Lord has to say to us from this text. After I pray, Lord, we do thank you for your word to us and how it is alive and well and embraced by most of us here.

[7 : 06] And I pray, Lord, that you would continue to open the eyes of our hearts. If there are those under the sound of my voice who are not there yet, we pray that this teaching would be the next step, Lord, in bringing them to faith in you and belief as it concerns these doctrines.

We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Look at verses 1 and 2. Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you for you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

Pretty simple, isn't it? Thessalonians have been taught about the eschatological climate that would surround the Lord's return, the times and the seasons.

Extensive teaching, because they had been taught that, was not needed. That's in essence what he said. Now, prior on last week, they had not been taught the specifics about those who died before the Lord returned.

And so therefore, Paul taught them regarding that. But as far as it concerned, the basic truth surrounding the Lord's return, it seems like they had been well-screwed in that.

[8 : 33] The terms, the times and seasons, this language that we see here is identical to what we see in Acts chapter 1, verses 6 and 7.

There it was that the Lord's disciples asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

Their question was an end-of-the-age kind of question that concerned end-of-the-age hope and restoration and renewal. It was a day-of-the-Lord question.

Are you going to deal with your or our enemies and restore us to where we belong as people of your favor? That, in essence, was what they were asking.

Jesus replied, Huh? Now is not the time. Huh? Now is not the day. Now is not the season for that. And he went on and told them, he said, It's not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has in his own power.

[9 : 38] But then that famous verse, Acts chapter 1, verse 8, But you shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you're going to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

That was the agenda. Then, not the restoration that they were talking about. Huh? One of the things that they had learned concerned, the Thessalonians had learned, concerned the day of the Lord.

And when we think of that term, it's a very prophetic term. There are two things, two questions that come to mind. Number one, what is the day of the Lord?

And number two, what about it? So what? Huh? So, in Scripture, in our text today, what is meant by the day of the Lord?

Huh? Again, this was, for Paul, it was end-of-the-age kind of terminology. And for Paul, and you can see this in others of his letters, it referred to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[10 : 45] For Paul, that's what it meant. Huh? The return of Christ was in view when Paul mentioned the day of the Lord. It's an Old Testament term, but it's filled with New Testament meaning in view of Jesus Christ coming into the world and his person and his work.

In the Old Testament prophetic books that included verses like Amos chapter 5, verses 18 through 20, the phrase referred to a future day of reckoning.

A time when the Lord was going to intervene. It was a time of the Lord's visitation on the stage of human history where God was going to come out of the shadows to very center stage in the context of human history.

And what was he going to do? He was going to set the record straight and there was going to be retribution for the Lord's enemies as well as reward for the righteous.

That's what was meant by the day of the Lord. And it's to be equated with the Lord, the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. What about the day?

[11 : 59] We see that in the verses that are before us. There are several things I believe that really we need to embrace and see and understand. It's basic Christian teaching as it relates to the end time, but it's things again that we need to, we have reiterated and we need to be refreshed and reviewed concerning them.

First thing we see is in verse 2. It is unpredictable in its timing. The day of the Lord is unpredictable in its timing.

We don't know when it will be. The return of Christ will come like a thief in the night. Have you ever had anything taken from you, stolen from you?

Several years ago, our home was broken into and guess what? I never got a phone call from the thief. He never told me. I didn't get an email or text message saying, hey, Arthur, I'm going to be over there on Monday.

I remember what it was, September, I believe, the 15th. Just wanted to let you know that I was going to drop by and I was going to take a few things. I'm going to help myself. No. Thieves don't work like that, do they?

[13 : 11] They have a plan, but may have a plan, but they don't let you know about it. And if you've had been violated in that particular way, nobody lets you know that it was going to happen.

Thieves don't function like that. The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. And it's likely that Paul's teaching was based on the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospels, particularly as it concerned his return.

Matthew chapter 24 helps us to see that. Luke chapter 12. As a matter of fact, I want you to read Luke chapter 12, verses 39 through 46. Not all of those, just a few verses, 39 and 40.

But listen to this. This is what our Lord says. Know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into.

Now, had I known whoever it was that was going to come on September the 15th, 2008. At least I wouldn't have went to the office on that day. I would have been waiting for him, huh?

[14 : 20] Or her, whoever it might have been. But here's what it says. You also must be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour, check it out, that you do not expect, huh?

It's unpredictable as it relates to its timing. Huh? When we consider the thief in the night language that's here and other language in the text, we can conclude several things about the day of the Lord.

The Lord's coming will be unannounced. It will be unexpected. There's an element of surprise. There's perspective is as, all is well.

But there's an element of surprise, huh? The Lord's coming is, in fact, unpredictable. And though there have been those who have ventured to guess when, I mean, down through the history, there have been those who have said when the date and have given dates.

Back in 1988, there was a book that was released entitled 88 Reasons Why the Rapture is in 1988. Very, very clever title, wasn't it?

[15 : 30] Guess what happened when it didn't happen in 1988? They came out with another book in 89, and guess what it was entitled? 89 Reasons Why the Lord's Gonna Come in 1989. Interesting.

We don't know, huh? But also notice, so it's unpredictable in its timing, but look at verse 3. It's inescapable in its consequences.

Unpredictable in its timing, inescapable in its consequences. While people are saying there is peace and security, then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

Women, I or the other brothers cannot identify with that. But I remember several incidents where ladies that I know did not make it to the hospital because labor pains came.

There was a 2, an I-290 birth in our congregation at Judson. Birth right alongside 290 because labor came, and she didn't make it.

[16 : 40] There was an outside-the-door emergency room at West Suburban Hospital because the sister just didn't quite make it. It's inescapable the Lord's coming and its consequences.

When people are seeing and experiencing the normal rhythms of life suddenly, like labor pains with the pregnant woman, inescapable destruction will come.

When things in the very economy of God reach their tipping point, and we don't know when that will be, destruction will come.

The retributive justice of God will emerge like a child from its mother's womb And all that accompanies the second coming of Christ.

It's unpredictable in its timing. It's inescapable in its consequences, but it is unsurpassed in its implications for those who belong to Christ.

[17 : 48] Well, Pastor J, where do you get that from? That's what we see in the entire book. Chapter 1 and verse 10, it will be a day of deliverance for God's people.

In chapter 2, verse 19, it's like a graduation time, a day of presentation and recognition for God's people. In chapter 3, verse 13, it will be a day when God's children come before him as Father for approval.

And then, oh, as we looked at him last week, it will be a time of gathering to meet Christ. It will be like a family reunion. Those who have gone before us, we will meet up with them, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

It's unsurpassed in its implications for the people of God. What about it? It's unpredictable in its timing.

It's inescapable in its consequences, but it's also unsurpassed in its implications for God's people. There's more that could be said there. So let's move on to descriptions in verses 4 through 8.

[19 : 07] Two kinds of people are here described. Look at verse 4. It says, but we are not in, but you are not in darkness, brothers.

And look at verse 6. So then let us not sleep as what? Others. So there's the brothers that are in view, and then there are the rest, others that are in view.

There are day people on the one hand, and there are night people on the other. Christians are not in darkness, but are children of light, children of the day.

We are day people, huh? We are those who have received light from God above. Jesus, John chapter 8, verse 12. And Jesus spoke to them again saying, I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the very light of light. Light and darkness are used figuratively in Scripture.

[20 : 23] Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 8. For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, Paul tells the Ephesian believers.

And try to discern what the will of the Lord is as children of light. And he goes on down and says, awake sleeper, rise from the dead. Christ shall give you light.

The contrast is clear in verse 4, isn't it? You are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief, unlike those in verse 3.

They're not like those who would be caught off guard in verse 3. Those being addressed here are the offspring of light from above, not the darkness from below.

that works worth to reflect that. Look at verse 6. It goes on down to speak about, let us not sleep, but let us keep awake and be sober.

[21 : 20] That's in essence what he's saying. In view of who we are, he gives several exhortations in view of the realities of who we are as the people of God. In verse 6, we find instructions both in the negative as well as in the positive.

So then, let us not sleep as do others, but let us keep awake and be sober. Verse 7 describes the others in unflattering sleepers and drunkards.

Boy, those are not flattering kinds of terms. They are night people. Those who are in moral and spiritual darkness. They are blind to Christ and the light that is in him and the light that he gives.

Darkness is a darkness of the heart. It's a spiritual darkness. And people like this may appear very much to have it all together and be enlightened. But this kind of appearance of enlightenment must not be mistaken for in a moral or a sense of integrity.

These kind of people are in sync with the world and blinded to real spiritual reality. And this darkness and blindness is reflected in their words and their passions and their pursuits.

[22 : 40] Don't be asleep. A drunk. Rather, we are to be awake. We are to be fully in control. Not dull in our sensibilities. Not being intoxicated by anything.

Rather, we are to be sober. Look at verse 8 with me. For since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having on the breastplate of faith and of love and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

Look at there. Armor for protection is in view. Our sobriety has to do with our being protected by the breastplate of faith and love and the hope of our salvation.

Just like faith, hope, and love. We see that in chapter 1 and verse 3. We saw that earlier. The sobriety of the Christian is not based on any kind of patch that you might wear.

But rather, it's based on the protection that godly character affords for you and me. That's the source of our protection in this world. Those who are so clothed with this kind of armor are at their best in this world even as we await the Lord Jesus Christ in his return.

[23 : 59] Having on that kind of protection. Paul speaks of this in another passage, Romans chapter 13 verses 11 through 14. Let me just read this for you because it's a great parallel.

Besides this, know the time that the hour has come for you to awake from sleep, he tells them, for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night, this age of darkness is far gone, huh?

The day is at hand, that day of perfect light when the light of God will break more fully into this dark world, huh?

So then, let us cast off then in view of that day the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, Paul says, as in the daytime.

Not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify his desires.

[25 : 02] That's what he's saying. We're on the threshold of a new day and that demands something from you and me as believers in this world. We are to live as we are citizens of that new day, bringing that, the light of that day into this very world and our life situation that we are in today, huh?

Gospel hope last week means that we don't grieve as others. Gospel hope also means, according to these verses, that you and I do not live as others in this world.

Why not? Because you and I are people of the day. We are not night people. Under the cover of darkness, there are many things that happen and you notice the situation.

I mean, people sometimes are just ready to get out into the night at 9 and 10 o'clock. I'm ready to go to bed just about, but some people are just getting started.

Now, that doesn't mean that all those who do that are night people, but some of them are. They love the cover of the darkness because it doesn't enable people to fully see where you're going or who you're with or what you're doing.

[26 : 23] They're people of the day, huh? Though not knowing the day or the hour, we are to live in constant readiness as day people for our Lord's return.

Last week, text helped us to see that the gospel hope impacts our grieving for those who die before the return of the Lord. This week helps us to see how the reality of the Lord's coming needs to shape your living in this world.

One day, two descriptions. Look at verses 9 and 10 where we see to destiny. Oh, I love this verse.

Verse 9, for God has not destined us for wrath. For God's people, wrath is not the end game, but to obtain salvation.

There it is. How? Through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us. Here is our gospel hope so that whether we wake or sleep, similarly as we saw last week in chapter 4, and again, here it's speaking about the sleep of death, that wake or sleep where we're living are those who have gone on before us, we might live with him.

[27 : 47] That is our hope to destiny. There's a destiny of wrath, but also there's a destiny of salvation. As people of God, our destiny, our future destiny is not one of wrath.

That's the destiny of nine people. It's already been stated otherwise in verse 3 of the same chapter, but the destiny of wrath is the lot of those who are caught unprepared the day of the Lord.

When the Lord returns, huh? The destiny of those who are prepared is salvation based on what Jesus Christ has done for us, huh?

This means, the means of securing the salvation from wrath is the death of Christ. We see that in verse 10.

God's wrath has already been poured out on him and all who trust him as their sin bearer are delivered from wrath, huh?

[28 : 53] He has satisfied the penalty on Calvary. That's what, that's what the cross is all about. That Jesus took the penalty for you and me. Our destiny is the completed salvation that was purchased through the death of Jesus Christ, huh?

Whether dead or living, the destiny of all who believe in Christ is an eternity with him. One day, two descriptions, two destinies, and what about our duties?

We see that in verse 11. Therefore, encourage one another and build up one another just as you are doing. Again, Paul commends them for what they were doing, huh?

He instructs them to encourage one another, to build up one another. His review of these truths that surrounded the day of the Lord was one of the means of doing that. These were the plain truths that can encourage and enlighten rather than confuse and discourage.

And there's been a lot of that concerning the Lord's return. But these are the plain truths. This is eschatology one-on-one, the basic kinds of things that speaks about the Lord.

[30 : 05] And the nature of His coming and the kind of people that you and I are to be in view of His coming. Encourage one another. What does it mean? As children of the day living in a dark world, we must realize, friends, that this world is not our ultimate home.

Do we live like that? As if this world is not our home? Do we encourage one another in our readiness and preparedness? Do we encourage alertness and sobriety amongst each other?

They were to edify each other as members of the same family just as they were to love one another. Chapter 4, verse 9, and build each other up in that way. So how, what are some ways that we can build one another up in the family of God?

One of the ways is by sharing our gifts and resources while we wait. We are to do this both in our living but also in our liturgy, in our worship.

Scripture and song and other liturgical elements need to be put in place that remind us of our Lord's coming and our responsibilities in view of the Lord's coming.

[31 : 26] another thing that we must not be casual about is the Lord's table itself in this particular regard because it is a sacrament that the Lord has given us when?

Until he returns. So both in our living and in our liturgy we can encourage one another and we can build one another up while we wait.

So, what am I saying today? Simply this. Though Christ's coming is unpredictable in its timing and inescapable as it concerns its consequences, it is also unsurpassed in its implication for those of us who belong to Christ.

In view of those things we must be alert and awake at all times encouraging one another and building up one another so that we can be all that the Lord would have us to be in this world.

that's the truth of this particular passage as we see it. Simple truth regarding the Lord's return but can have great impact and implications for you and me in this world.

[32 : 41] Christians are to be prepared for Christ's return by living though as those who are destined for a completed salvation in Christ's return. Are you ready?

Do you believe that? Do you embrace it? Do you allow these things to shape your living? May we do so more and more until Jesus comes.

Let us pray.