

Expectations of Salvation

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[0 : 00] Okay, well our series on the book of 1 Thessalonians from the New Testament has been called Great Expectations, which I shamelessly stole from the book by Charles Dickens from the novel.

So let's keep on stealing from Dickens. Let's talk about a tale of two cities. Two cities, the two cities in this story, they're not cities in conflict with each other.

This is where we depart from Dickens. It basically has nothing to do with that. I just like stealing other people's intellectual property. These two cities, there's no conflict between them because they've got a much bigger problem to worry about.

So let's say our two cities, they are on the west coast of Vancouver Island. I know there's no cities there for real, but let's just say that there are, okay? Let's say that government scientists have informed the city councils of these two cities that not only can they expect a great earthquake, the big one, not only can they expect that to shake their cities, but they can also expect a great tsunami to follow.

A tsunami that is going to wipe their cities from the map. The big one could come at any time. It could take place 30 minutes from now. It could take place 300 years from now.

[1 : 17] The government scientists all agree that when it does come, the big one will be unavoidable and will be utterly catastrophic. So, each of the city councils, they meet, they're going to discuss how are they going to respond.

So here's what the council for the first city decides. The first city council decides this. The best way to respond is to place a seismograph. A device that measures the tremors in the earth.

To place a seismograph in every public place in full view of all the citizens. Multiple seismographs throughout the city in every post office, in every mall, in city hall, in every public place.

And they are going to create a commission that's going to analyze the seismic readings and look for patterns. And they're going to hold public forums in which their citizens can voice their interpretations of the seismograms.

Voice their opinions of when the big one will take place. Talk about, you know, all the animals are kind of acting all weird. Maybe it's about to happen. You know, that is the way the first city is going to respond.

[2 : 21] The council for the second city decides to respond in a different way. The second city council creates an evacuation plan for the residents of the city. It designates an evacuation route to escape to higher ground after the earthquake hits.

It directs the schools to regularly drill their staff and their students on how to seek shelter during the quake. How to evacuate before the tsunami arrives. The city council sets aside funds each year from the city budget to stockpile food, water, medical supplies on higher ground.

Now, of these two cities, which one do you think is truly prepared for the big one? Which one do you think is truly prepared? The first or the second?

First one, show of hands. Nope, what? Nobody? Second, show of hands. Okay, well, good. I'm glad that you all agree because you agree with Jesus. And do you agree with his apostle Paul?

That's what we're going to discover today as we continue reading Paul's letter to the first century church in the city of Thessalonica. Paul has been reminding these faithful but persecuted Christians that they have great expectations to look forward to.

[3 : 36] They have great expectations that God is their father who has called them into his own kingdom and glory. Great expectations that his Holy Spirit has been given to them in the here and now.

Great expectations that Jesus Christ, their Lord, is going to return one day. Even those of them who are dead are going to be raised to life and will always be with the Lord.

And now Paul is going to talk to them about a great and catastrophic event that they are wondering about. An event that Jesus himself warned his disciples about. Now, this future cataclysm is not merely an earthquake.

It's much bigger than the big one. It is something far greater, something that will usher in the great expectations of all Christians. Across time and space.

So, you can follow along as I read Paul's words from 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 1-11. Now, if you're using one of the blue Bibles that our ushers provide, you'll find this on page 987.

[4 : 38] 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 1-11 in the New Testament of the Bible. Paul writes this. 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 is peace and security. 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 are 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.

[5 : 41] 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. Let's go back to verses 1 through 3. We'll start there. And you'll notice in verse 1. That Paul begins by talking about the times and the seasons.

The times and the seasons when this great cataclysm will take place. Perhaps this is a question that they had for him. He writes to them. That when it comes to these times and seasons.

Here's what he says. You have no need to have anything written to you. In other words, they already know all that they need to know. They don't need additional details.

[6 : 47] They don't need additional speculation. They don't need TV preachers. They don't need YouTube experts. Unfurling these complex charts. And linking the latest oil spill and military conflict.

With some sort of obscure verse somewhere in Ezekiel. They don't need somebody unveiling that mysterious conspiracy. That's connecting the Russian government. With the Vatican. With the Illuminati.

With the secret society of werewolves. You know, Paul is saying. You already have what you need. No further speculation. No further teaching is required.

We don't prepare for an earthquake by speculating on seismograms. And watching the behavior of our dogs. That's not the way you prepare.

Here's what Paul has already taught them. What they already know from him. And from the scriptures. He tells them in verse 2. You yourselves are fully aware. That the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

[7 : 50] Now it's really important to understand something here. When Paul mentions the day of the Lord. Paul is using a phrase that has a very specific meaning to his readers.

The day of the Lord. That was an expression that was used by Old Testament prophets. This expression signified a climactic time in which God actively intervenes in history.

Primarily for judgment. So for example, the prophet Joel. Spoke to the nation of Judah. About a great locust plague. In Joel chapter 1. When he said. Alas for the day.

For the day of the Lord. Is near. And as destruction from the Almighty it comes. The book of Lamentations. Mourned the destruction of Jerusalem.

At the hands of the Babylonian Empire. With these words. You summoned as if to a festival day. My terrors on every side. And on the day of the anger of the Lord.

[8 : 52] No one escaped or survived. Those whom I held and raised. My enemy destroyed. These events. These moments in history.

Foreshadowed. A far greater cataclysm. A far greater disaster. There were four shocks that warned of a great earthquake. That is still to come. The day of the Lord's judgment is coming.

The day of the Lord's judgment is coming. So when Paul says the day of the Lord. Will come like a thief in the night. He is warning about a final day of the Lord.

That day when Jesus Christ returns to earth. To judge the world. To punish those who do evil. And to save those who have believed in him. His apostle Peter writes about this event in 2 Peter chapter 3.

The day of the Lord will come like a thief. And then the heavens will pass away with a roar. And the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved. And the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

[9 : 58] This is a terrifying exposing event of judgment. And you'll notice at the beginning there. That just like Paul. Peter describes the day of the Lord as coming like a thief.

There's a reason they both use the same language. It's not a coincidence. Both of them are actually drawing on the teaching of Jesus himself. Here's what Jesus had to say about his return in Matthew chapter 24.

Therefore, stay awake. For you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this. That if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming.

He would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore, you also must be ready. For the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

The day of the Lord's judgment is coming. First of all, it is coming unexpectedly. It is coming unexpectedly. Jesus knew that my tendency, Jesus knew that your tendency, is to speculate about the times and seasons of his coming.

[11 : 14] To try to forecast the future. To try to read into these things. Even his disciples were asking him in Matthew chapter 24, When will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming?

And the end of the age? Now, if you read Jesus' entire response in Matthew 24, you'll notice the first thing that Jesus does, the very first thing he does in response to this question, is to warn his disciples.

Not to speculate about false signs and false messiahs and false conspiracies. Not to get caught up in these things. Jesus is concerned that we will be preparing for the day of the Lord in the wrong way by speculating on seismograms.

In fact, the Apostle Paul warns us here in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 verse 3, that the day of the Lord will come while people are saying there is peace and security.

It will come unexpectedly. The general consensus will be that life is good. The future is bright. The government has things under control.

[12 : 22] In Paul's day, there is this sense of peace and security in Thessalonica. The Pax Romana, under the military might of Rome, keeps everything secure and stable.

In our day, there is, I suppose to a lesser degree with each passing year, but there is this sense of peace and security, the Pax Americana, under the military and economic might of the USA.

And Paul warns us that the peace and security that the people, like his readers, might be tempted to trust in. The peace and security that you and I might be tempted to trust in.

It's like an old brick building that seems so solid, well built, so stable, only to be completely leveled by a great 9.0 earthquake that is coming, leveled by the day of the Lord.

Paul writes in verse 3 that on that day, sudden destruction will come upon them. The day of the Lord's judgment is coming. It is coming unexpectedly, and second, it is coming destructively.

[13 : 36] We're going to talk more about that when we reach verse 9. It is coming unexpectedly, it is coming destructively, sudden destruction will come upon them. As labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, a woman who is about to give birth, knows that the pain of childbirth could begin at any time.

You can't predict it. It is going to be sudden, it is going to be painful, and it is inevitable. In other words, one of the commentaries in this letter, the author of this commentary, writes that the image of childbirth drives home the abrupt and inescapable trauma of the day of the Lord.

As Paul says at the end of verse 3, they will not escape. The day of the Lord's judgment is coming unexpectedly, destructively, and unavoidably.

It is coming unexpectedly, destructively, and unavoidably. So, how are you and I going to respond?

Well, what we do in response is going to depend a lot on who we are. What you do is going to depend on who you are. That's what Paul says in verses 4 through 8.

[14:59] Verse 4, he writes, Paul is reminding them that God has called them into his own kingdom and glory.

That's what he's later on going to write in Colossians chapter 1. The Father has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

So that you and I who are Christians, you and I who have believed in Jesus Christ, believe that he is our Lord and our Savior, we've been welcomed by God our Father.

We've been given a new inheritance. We've been given a new kingdom. redemption, forgiveness for our opposition and resistance to God.

We trust his promises, including his promise that he, that Jesus Christ is going to return. And so in verse 4, Paul says, you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.

[16:22] For those in darkness, those who don't believe, the day of the Lord is going to be an unexpected disaster. But for us, it is an anticipated event.

We will be prepared for it. Like that second town that is prepared and drilled in anticipation of the coming earthquake. We will be prepared for it. Paul says in verse 5 why we respond differently. You are all children of light, children of the day. Why are we children of light?

Because we have welcomed the light of the world, Jesus Christ. Jesus once said in John chapter 12, the light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you.

The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light that you may become sons of light.

[17:31] Because we have the light-bearing, revealing presence of Jesus Christ with us, we walk in the light.

And we are children of light. We know that the day is coming. He is going to return to live with us forever and ever.

And we not only are prepared for that day, we long for that day. And so we are children of the day. That is who we are.

So Paul continues in verse 5. We are 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. Our identity, who we are, determines our response, what we do.

[18:29] Who we are determines what we do. Instead of sleeping through this present age of history, instead of sleepwalking as we go about our business, we remain alert.

alert. The day of the Lord's judgment is coming, so we remain alert. The day of the Lord's judgment is coming, so we remain alert.

Here's how the commentator Gene Green puts it. Christians stand prepared for the final event of history by having a sober and alert moral life and not by date setting.

Such is their nature and so they do. Such is their nature and so they do. We remain sober and alert. We live a holy and honorable life of love that is fitting for members of God's family. That is what we are meant to be. If we were still living in darkness, we would behave the way that Paul writes in verse 7.

[19:34] Those who sleep, sleep at night. And those who get drunk are drunk at night. The darkness, the night. In the ancient world, that was associated with concealment, with deception, with evil.

So here's how Gene Green explains it. Before the time when city streets were brightly illuminated by street lights, the night was thought to be a horrible and sinister time.

While we might talk excitedly about going out for the night, they would speak about the night negatively and fearfully. In the New Testament, for example, the night is the time when the Lord was betrayed and denied.

The night is the time when evil people do their deeds. As Christostom, an early Christian preacher, commented, For it is just as corrupt and wicked men do all things as in the night, escaping notice of all and enclosing themselves in darkness.

darkness. For tell me, does not the adulterer watch for the evening and the thief for the night? Does not the violator of the tombs carry on all his trade in the night? But this present darkness, this night, is passing away.

[20 : 46] And here's the word of warning. It is passing away with all those who cling to the night, who want to remain in the night. they will pass away with it. When the great day of the Lord comes to replace it, when the day comes to replace the night, Paul writes in Romans chapter 13, You know the time that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep, for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

The night is far gone, the day is at hand, so then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. And so in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 8, he writes, 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.

Paul pictures you and me as soldiers standing watch. Soldiers who are not going to succumb to the temptation to be drunk, to fall asleep at their watch.

Soldiers who put on a huge pot of coffee and plan to stay awake all night long, who insist on remaining alert and sober no matter what it takes, who are already armed with the armor of light. Back in chapter 1, verse 5, Paul told the Thessalonian Christians that he has heard of your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[22 : 29] Faith, love, and hope. This faith and love serve as a breastplate. They guard us from the temptation to give in, to succumb to evil desires.

the evil desires we've been talking about over the last few weeks and that we will be talking about over the next few weeks, the desires to behave in an unholy and dishonorable manner.

On the day when Christ appears, our holy faith and love ensure that on that day we will appear blameless in holiness before him. And this hope, this hope, our great expectation of Jesus' return, Paul gives it special treatment.

He says, it's a helmet. This armor is our protection. This armor is our preparation for the day of the Lord.

We put on this armor and we remain alert. And Paul puts a special emphasis on that helmet, the hope of salvation. We remain alert, we trust on that day that on that day the Lord Jesus Christ is going to save us.

[23 : 44] But if we're going to have these great expectations, we need confidence that this is indeed what is going to happen, that we will be saved on that day. How will Jesus do it?

What is this hope that you and I need to recite to ourselves, to drill ourselves in, to remind each other of each and every day of our lives?

verses 9 through 11. Paul tells us what our hope is. He explains where our hope comes from.

The day of the Lord's judgment is coming, so we remain alert, prepared by our great expectations of his salvation. The day of the Lord's judgment is coming, so we remain alert, prepared by our great expectations of his salvation.

So first of all, Paul reminds us what we are saved from. In order to be saved, you need to be saved from something. He writes in verse 9, God has not destined us for wrath.

[24 : 51] Now the question is, whose wrath? Whose anger? Jesus has warned us that when he returns on the day of the Lord, he is the one bringing judgment and wrath against everyone who opposes his good and rightful reign, everyone who wants the night to remain.

Jesus told his disciples a parable about his return in Matthew chapter 24. Who then is the faithful and wise servant whom his master has set over his household to give them their food at the proper time?

Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.

But if that wicked servant says to himself, my master is delayed and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites.

In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul describes this fate as the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord.

[26 : 23] The punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord. And that is what Jesus promises and guarantees to everyone who rejects him as Lord and Savior.

Jesus is not going to save those who do not want him to save them. Jesus is not going to save people who want to remain in the night.

When the day comes, there will no longer be a place for them. But that is not your destiny. And that is not my destiny.

If we believe in Jesus Christ, Paul writes this in verse 9. Here's the good news. God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

You and I who believe in Jesus Christ, yes, we will be saved on the day of the Lord. Lord. We will not be saved by any human government, by any military might or political programs.

[27 : 42] They can't hold back the day of the Lord any more than they can hold back an earthquake. We will not be preserved because we've speculated and charted the end times and gained a secret knowledge that is going to keep us safe.

We will not be saved, even on the basis of our holiness and good works. We're not saved without that holiness, but we are not saved on the basis of it either. It is through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is what he has already done that is going to save us on that day. What has Jesus done? In verse 10, Paul tells us he died for us.

you and I are going to be saved because Jesus died in our place 2,000 years ago.

We will be saved because on the cross Jesus has already born, already taken the wrath of God against our sin.

[28 : 55] We are going to be saved saved. Because for you and for me, this day of the Lord took place 2,000 years ago at his crucifixion on Calvary where our Lord Jesus Christ died for us.

For you and for me, the day of the Lord has already happened saved. And we are saved. And why did Jesus do it? Why did Jesus endure the wrath of God?

Why did he endure the punishment of hell itself on your behalf and on mine? Why did he suffer for us?

Verse 10, we read, he died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we might live with him. So when Paul is talking about sleep here, what he's doing is he's taking us back to chapter 4, which Jonathan preached on last week. When he says whether we are awake or asleep, what he means is whether we are alive or whether we have died.

[30 : 14] No matter whether you and I are still alive on the day of the Lord, or whether we have died and our souls are in heaven, temporarily separated from the body, we know that one day we will receive new and glorious bodies, and we will be resurrected from the dead, and we will meet Jesus Christ, and we will live together with Jesus Christ in the new heavens and the new earth forever and ever.

That is what we are saved for. We are saved for a great reunion on that day.

We are saved for new resurrection life with our Lord Jesus Christ, our Lord who died for us because he wanted you, and he wanted me to live, to truly live with him forever and ever.

As much as you want to be with Jesus Christ, as much as you sing, O come, O come, Emmanuel, he wants to be with you more. He wants it so much that he died so that that could happen.

And so we have this hope of salvation, so we have these great expectations, because we know that his death is going to succeed in saving us on the day of the Lord.

[32 : 01] We are prepared by our great expectations of his salvation. We are looking forward to that day. It reminds me a little bit, just that sense, that anticipation, and that change the day brings.

It just reminds me of 10 years ago, driving back up from the state of Louisiana to my home in Indiana at the time. It's a long drive, especially long when two of you are driving and you're driving through the middle of the night.

Especially long when neither of you are good night drivers. And I remember we were trading off back and forth trying to catch a little bit of sleep and it got to the point, I'm driving, I've got the air conditioner blowing on me full blast, I'm hitting myself in the face to keep myself awake, I can barely do it, just an hour at a time, I am just in this, I shouldn't have been driving.

I'm in this groggy haze in the night, this stupor. And I remember catching a little bit of a break, a little bit of a nap early in the morning and waking up and the sun was streaming in the windows of the van and I could see all the cornfields around me and I knew I was home in Indiana.

The day had come and you know what happens? As soon as the light came on, I was wide awake again because I was a child of the day and that was where I belonged and I was finally home.

[33 : 40] The long night is soon to be over. The day is coming when you will be home, when your Lord returns. Paul wants to ensure that his readers remain prepared by their great expectations and so what he does is he charges them in verse 11.

Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up just as you are doing. Our great expectations, they don't come naturally.

We need one another. Our great expectations are a community project. We can't maintain them on our own. I don't know about you, I get distracted, I get confused, I forget these things, I get deceived so easily by the darkness of this present world.

I think that what we see around us and before us, that's all that there is ever going to be. I just throw up my hands and say, yeah, that's just the way things are.

I'm tempted to give in to the things our culture values, to love people the way that our culture tells me to love them. to give up on people when the culture tells me to give up, to abandon the things that Jesus taught, because our culture says it's not important.

[35 : 09] We need one another so that we remain sober, alert, encouraged, and prepared for the day of the Lord. God, I'm going to make it a new priority to remind each of you, as Paul put it in the book of Philippians, that the Lord is at hand.

The Lord is at hand. Would he do the same for me? Would he do the same for one another? That is how we live as members of God's family.

That is how we live as citizens of his kingdom. That is how we live as children of the light, children of the day. The day of the Lord's judgment is coming, so we remain alert, prepared by our great expectations of his salvation.

Let's give thanks to our God.