May the grace of God and of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ be upon you and all your family.

The world grinds on through the COVID-19 pandemic along with all the other problems that haven’t gone away. This is the fallen world we live in; this is the result of sin. But we who are the people of God continue to have hope, knowing that our God is all-powerful and these things are not beyond what He is able to deal with. In spite of everything, we know that there is a light at the end of the tunnel; the light of heaven.

During this time, keep working the good works that God gives you, don’t be deceived by anything that is not of Scripture, and keep looking up, for our redemption draws near.

*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* Hebrews 4:14-16

In Christ’s love

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5-3-20

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

The record of Paul and Silas coming to Thessalonica on his second missionary journey is recorded in Acts 17. They were able to bring several people there to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, before the Jews stirred up a mob and Paul had to leave town. But it is Christ who builds His church, and the church in Thessalonica grew. The church underwent the usual persecutions that the body of Christ experienced at that time. Harassment by the local population, heresy brought into the church, and the occasional confusion regarding doctrinal matters. Paul’s letters to this church answered the questions that he had received from them, and also offered them encouragement.

In the verses we are considering, the Thessalonian church apparently had some question concerning the time that Jesus would come back. They fully believed that He would return to set up His kingdom here on earth, just as we ought to believe; they just wondered when. Lots of us wonder the same thing. Paul clearly gave the only answer there is and then explained what the church should be doing in the meantime. As usual with the Bible, the answer Paul gave to the Thessalonians is exactly the answer that applies to us today.

*Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.*

Paul is deeply committed to the Thessalonian church and loves the people. He shows this when he calls them “brethren”. His teaching to them is gentle, this is not a harsh rebuke. Sometimes we have to be reminded of what we already know, but forget in times of turmoil.

Jesus made it very clear that no-one knows when He is coming back the second time. Matthew 24:36, “*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone*.” Paul is reminding them of this, a fact that he most certainly taught them. They don’t need anything written because they already know it.

This is very typical of us as human-beings, we want to know things; especially if we’re told we can’t know. Even in this day and age there are people trying to figure out when Christ will return. This is a vain work on our part, even to the point of being sinful. God has made it clear in His word that this is one of the things that He alone knows and He has chosen not to share it with us. First off, He is sovereign and He can do that. But He is also not going to do anything that would harm us. Apparently, it is not good for us to know the exact time of Jesus’ return.

This also teaches us to trust in Him. As Christians, we have chosen to trust our salvation and eternity entirely to God through Jesus Christ. So, we can certainly trust Him to have Jesus’ second advent at the perfect time. God has chosen to keep the timing of the day of the Lord to Himself, and we, as His servants, need to humbly accept our Lord’s decision.

Paul uses a metaphor to describe the return of Christ, “*like a thief in the night*”. This doesn’t mean that Jesus will be stealing anything or that His return will take place at night time. This shows the unexpectedness of it. People don’t generally expect a robber in their house; they are busy sleeping. If they expected him, they would be ready. The day of the Lord will come when all the non-believers are not ready; and it will be too late. But the believers will be ready. Believers will be ready because we are to be ready at all times.

The Christians in Thessalonica faced persecution from the rest of the society around them. The town was quite wealthy, but had only become so recently. The main reason for their new prosperity was because of Rome. Since Rome had helped them so much, they went to great pains to honor the Caesar, which also kept Rome’s favor and money coming in. The town had a large temple dedicated to emperor worship. The Christians would not worship the emperor, so the people considered them a threat to the continued good will from Rome.

In verse 3, Paul reminds them of what is coming for their persecutors. *While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape*. The non-believers in Thessalonica felt that things in general were pretty good. The people were getting by, making a living, and things seems to be going smoothly. The problem for them was their refusal to accept the Gospel. When that day of the Lord comes, it will mean destruction for them; a permanent separation from God for all eternity; an eternity of paying the price for their sins themselves.

Again, Paul demonstrates how fast this will happen. A pregnant woman knows that labor pains are coming, but she doesn’t know when. All of a sudden, they are there. When Jesus comes back, it will be all of a sudden. It is exactly the same now as it was then. People go about life thinking things are okay. There will be no warning in time to change one’s life and there will be no hiding from His return. This is a somber thought for those who won’t accept salvation from Jesus. And this is nothing that Christians should rejoice about. We need to pray for those who have not yet been saved and it is our responsibility to share the Gospel with others. We must remember that it is only by the grace of God that we ourselves are saved; it has nothing to do with our own merit.

Paul next moves on to the good news for the people of the church. *But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness*. The Christians are not in darkness. In other words, they do not live in sin and they are believers in Jesus for salvation. In the darkness, a person can’t see; but we can see in the light. In 1 John 1:5 we read, “*God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all*”. We are in Jesus and we are in God, therefore, we are in light. Also, through Jesus, we become adopted children of God, and so, *we are sons of light*.

Light also comes in the day time, so we are “*sons of day*”. Evil and sin lurk in the darkness; people tend to do bad things at night. This is because they don’t want to be seen; they don’t want anyone to know what they are doing. These are the ones who will be overtaken; surprised, as by a thief in the night. But the Christian will be awake and ready. The day of the Lord is an event to look forward to.

Just because we are Christians doesn’t mean that we get to coast. There are things for us to do and there are ways for us to behave. This is hard when we have satan, the world, and even our own selves (our flesh), enticing us toward evil. But we have Jesus in our hearts, the Holy Spirit indwelling us, and a new spirit within us. We are therefore called to resist evil.

So, Paul next tells us, “*so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation*”.

First, we don’t sleep as others do. Paul is not telling us to avoid sleep; we are human-beings and we must have sleep to survive. The sleep referred to here is ignoring what is coming. It is allowing oneself to be immersed in the world and its value systems. It is being unprepared for the coming day of the Lord.

Christians are to be alert and sober (self-controlled). The Bible does give us some indications of the coming day of the Lord; there are signs to watch for and many of them are present now. This alertness isn’t to cause fear or panic but to give us hope that we will soon be with our Lord. It is also to help us realize time is short and we need to spread the Gospel to others so they will be ready. We are to be self-controlled. We aren’t to give in to all the desires that we have that are contrary to God’s word. Drunkenness is just an example of someone who has lost control; we can’t allow ourselves to come under the control of any sin.

Nighttime is for sleeping and that is usually what the Christian should be doing at night. Those who live in sin often do what they do at night. Again, that’s not to say that being awake at night is a sin; sometimes it’s necessary. What we do should be in the light, we shouldn’t need to hide what we do.

Of course, just like the Thessalonians, we are under attack. Society doesn’t like our allegiance to God and to Jesus. We need some armor; and our armor is spiritual. In Ephesians 6, Paul goes into great detail about spiritual warfare and the necessary armor and weapons. Here he briefly mentions what Christians need to protect themselves.

When we are attacked for our Christians beliefs, it is our faith that keeps us safe. If our faith is not true, then we will give in under persecution and deny our Saviour. Love is a key part of the Christian life. We are called to love those who cause us problems. This is contrary to the ways of the world, but Jesus has a higher calling for us. Loving others also protects us; it keeps us from becoming bitter and it leads us to pray for those who are lost. We remember what their fate is.

That hope of salvation is what keeps us going. This is a sure hope; something we know for sure is coming. No matter what happens to us, we can keep looking forward to that day of the Lord. That day will bring eternal life to us and eternal happiness. Never again will we face the problems of this world; the problem of sin. We will be freed of evil.

Verse 9 gives us the reason we want to behave in ways that are pleasing to God. *For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him*. When the Holy Spirit gives us the necessary faith to believe in Jesus and we accept Him as our Lord and Saviour, a wonderful thing happens: We are no longer children of wrath. We will not spend eternity facing the wrath of God.

God’s wrath is something that we need to dwell on occasionally to help us stay “awake”. People sometimes make the mistake of thinking God’s wrath isn’t real. After all, the Bible tells us that God is love. God is love; but that does not mean that He is nothing but love. He is not some mystical emotion that permeates the universe. God is a spirit being and love is just one of His attributes. Another one is justice. Because He is just, all sin must be punished. All sin is ultimately against God and God is an infinite being; so the punishment for sin is also infinite. This is why God’s wrath is poured out for eternity on those who don’t have Christ as Saviour. We cannot smile at God’s wrath or ignore it; it is terrible and no-one can stand against it. Jesus took the wrath in our place. Jesus is the demonstration of another of God’s attributes: His mercy. Praise Him for it!

Because of the perfect work of Jesus on the cross, we who accept Him are saved from God’s wrath. Whether we are awake or asleep; whether we are paying attention to the signs or not; we are safe. Once we truly belong to God through Jesus, no-one or nothing can take us from Him. We are safe in His arms.

This is wonderful news for Christians and Paul asked the Thessalonians to encourage one another and build each other up. This is for us also. This is the reason Christian fellowship is so important. We share in each other’s joys; we mourn each other’s sorrows. We remind each other of the good things of God during this life. He is in control; nothing happens on this earth that He doesn’t allow; and *He works all things to the good of those who love Him*. We suffer in this life; but our hope is in the next. We work in this life to prepare us for the next. And we, as Christians, can show the love of Christ to a whole world of hurting people; we can offer them the sure hope of salvation.

Prayer

Jesus, our Lord and King, our Saviour; We worship You now in love. You are worthy of glory and honor; may our voices be added to those of the angels who surround Your throne in heaven to praise You. By Your perfect sacrifice, You have saved us from the wrath of God that we deserve. We recognize that we are saved by Your grace and not of our own merit.

Help us now, we pray, to live our lives alert and sober; in self-control guided by the Holy Spirit. After all You have done for us, it is our desire to please You with our lives. We know that we can never repay You. May Your Holy Spirit work in us that we may see the signs of Your coming so that we can be awake. We ask that Your Holy Spirit will keep us from giving in to worldly desires and always to seek Your will.

We know that this world is in darkness; grant that we may reflect the light of Christ in our lives, so that others will be attracted to You and receive Your blessed hope and assurance. Open our eyes to the needs of others; and to the times we can give encouragement to Your people.

These things we ask in the name of Jesus our Lord

Amen