3-28-21

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

In this letter that Paul has written to the church at Thessalonica, he is answering some questions they had. They were very concerned about the coming return of Jesus Christ. This is a good thing to be concerned about. He is coming back and if we aren’t ready, we’ll be in trouble. Also, there is a lot of mystery surrounding His return; there are a lot of things we don’t know. But, for the time being, that’s the way God wants it. He reveals to us in the Bible all He wants us to know.

If we all knew the exact time that Jesus would return, can you imagine all the people who would live sinful lives until a week before His return and then try to repent? That wouldn’t work because their hearts wouldn’t be right. But for we who are Christians, not knowing gives us the incentive to always be busy with the tasks that Christians are to be busy with.

Keep in mind that Paul had spent some time in Thessalonica spreading the Gospel and teaching the believers. We are told in the book of Acts that Paul reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue for three weeks. We don’t know how long he was able to stay teaching the Gentile and Jewish converts until he and Silas and Timothy were run out of town by the Jews.

He had obviously taught them about the return of Christ; that is basic to Christianity. But as we have already discussed, they had to ask Paul what would happen to those who died in Christ before Jesus returned. This led to Paul’s explanation of the resurrection and the Rapture. The next question they asked was regarding when Jesus would return. This is a natural question, one that we would all like to know the answer to. So, Paul now goes about responding to this inquiry.

Paul begins with telling them that he doesn’t really need to write about this subject because they already know the answer. He had explained to them while he was with them that no-one knew when Jesus would return. We can’t really blame them for asking, people are still asking today. Perhaps they were hoping there had been some new revelation or maybe Paul had some reason he couldn’t tell them while he was with them.

Ever since, there has been no shortage of people who have claimed to have the answer to that question. Unfortunately, there has never been a shortage of people who believed them. Some of these false prophets claim their knowledge based on certain Scriptures, or a special revelation; there are others who don’t even claim to be Christian but have special knowledge such as psychics or scientists. Some of those who believe them at least lose money from buying their books while others are duped into getting rid of everything they own. Worst of all, it can cause some to refuse to believe anything about Christianity when these people are proved wrong.

This all comes from people not reading, or perhaps believing, their Bibles. In Matthew 24:36, Jesus is very clear about the timing of His return: “*But about that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone*.” God the Father is the only one who knows when He will send Jesus back to earth to gather His people and to set up His Kingdom. It is very clear that we can’t know and that it’s not hidden somewhere else in Scripture. There will be no further revelation. We will find out when it will happen by it happening.

There are some who say that Jesus said we won’t know the “*day or the hour*”, but He didn’t say we couldn’t know the month or the year. That’s just dumb. Never try to play technicalities with God; you’ll lose. Additionally, Paul uses the terms “*times and epochs*” here; that covers everything.

Paul reminds the Thessalonian church that no-one knows when Jesus will come back, and he reminds them of what he already taught them. First, it will come *just like a thief in the night*. Jesus Himself uses this idea of His coming being like the coming of a thief in some of the Gospels and in Revelation. Paul uses it and so does Peter. It is a metaphor for being unexpected.

Obviously, thieves don’t send people notice that they will be coming to their house to rob them. When a thief comes, people are surprised and shocked. They were not ready; they didn’t think this was going to happen. This is especially true if you live in an area that doesn’t have much crime. Paul says that folks will be saying “*Peace and safety*!” They’ll be completely caught off guard when Jesus returns.

Additionally, it will come upon the world “*suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child*”. I think most of us know how this works; some know a little more directly than others. When a woman is in that condition, everyone knows that the labor pains are coming, but no-one knows when. It is sudden; there they are. And so it shall be with the coming of the Lord Jesus. It will be unexpected and it will be sudden. Most of the earth will be caught entirely off guard. But there is no doubt that it will take place.

Paul goes on to talk about two different groups of people. One group lives in the darkness; they are children of the night. This group is, unfortunately, the majority of the population of the earth. In the Bible, night and darkness are often associated with evil and with those who refuse to associate with the God of the Bible and with Jesus Christ. Throughout history, people have committed evil deeds, done what they know to be wrong, out of sight; under the cover of darkness; where they can hide what they do; thus the saying ‘deeds of darkness’.

As an aside, it is interesting for we who are Christians to note that what has historically been hidden, is being brought more into the open. Many are no longer interested in keeping their evil secret. In fact, society is turning so that evil is accepted and established as good. Although unsettling, this is no surprise to the Christian because this is exactly what the Bible tells us will happen.

The group who lives in darkness are the ones saying, “*Peace and safety*!”. Although it may occur to them that not everything is going right and there are things they want to change, they believe that they themselves are fine. Nobody calls them out for the wrong they do; and if someone does, they ignore them or shout them down. They believe their evil deeds are hidden. They convince themselves that there is no God.

These people who are sons of the darkness or sons of the night are the same as those who Jesus called sons of the devil. But they are blind to that fact; they believe themselves free to make their own decisions. They don’t realize that they are slaves of a cruel taskmaster. They don’t realize that destruction will come upon them; suddenly and unexpectedly. I think this unexpected destruction will be the beginning of the seven-year Tribulation. The worst part for them is that it leads to eternal destruction. As miserable as life will be during the Tribulation, it will be nothing compared to hell.

There is a terrible warning here in verse 3, “*and they will not escape*”. Too many depend on their wealth, status, strength, or intelligence. They believe that they can handle anything that comes along; they believe that nothing can stop them from fulfilling their own wills. We need to pray for these unfortunate souls. They neglect the power and holiness of God. These tend to become mockers, and the Bible points out their mistake.

2 Peter 3:3-7

*Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue just as they were from the beginning of creation.” For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed by being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly people.*

Christians have been told: mockers will be here in the last days; expect them. When mockers hear of Jesus coming back to earth, they tell us, ‘It’s been two thousand years; it’s not happening; there is no Jesus who is Messiah.’ The problem is that they have forgotten history. God is almighty, He formed the heavens and brought forth the earth out of water. The people living in Noah’s time were complacent. They too thought they were safe from God since nothing had happened to them for a long time. They didn’t realize God was being patient; which is exactly what is happening now. When God’s patience reached its end, He was willing to destroy the earth with water, rendering judgement on the unrighteous. He will do the same once more with fire.

The non-believer will be unprepared. He will be taken by surprise; destruction will come upon him suddenly and without warning; and there will be no escape.

These children of the night are one group Paul mentioned; the other group are the children of the day. These are, of course, Christians. Paul tells the church at Thessalonica, “*you are all sons of light and sons of day*”. In the Bible, light and day are often metaphors for things and people associated with God and Christ Jesus. As Jesus said in John 8:12, “*I am the Light of the world; the one who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life*.”

A person who stays in the light is not afraid of others seeing what he is doing. They are not afraid of having their deeds exposed. Because they are doing nothing wrong; nothing to be ashamed of. This should define the life of a Christian. When we remain in Christ, we remain in the light, and the things we do are good and pleasing to God. We are awake and active in the daytime. Again, because it doesn’t matter if others see what we are doing. Those who do evil are active at night to hide their works.

If you think about it, why is there any reason for most of us to be out running around at night? Yes, some have to work at night and there may be some emergency that brings us out at night. But for the most part, if someone is out at night, they are up to no good. They are at least engaging in something that may not be pleasing to God.

When Paul says that we are sons of the light, he is saying that we are children of God. Always keep in mind that once we accept Jesus as Saviour, God adopts us as His children. This comes with all the benefits of having God as our Father.

We must be a little careful with the word “*sleep*” in these verses. In verse 6 it is a metaphor; in verse 7 it is not. Paul is kind of playing with the words here and lining them up with drunkenness and sobriety. In verse 6 we are told to “*not sleep as others do*” and to be “*alert and sober*”. Sober here carries the idea of self-control; something that a drunk does not have. If we don’t sleep as others do, it means that we are paying attention; it means we are alert to what is going on around us. And this is in a spiritual sense.

The Bible has warned us: Jesus will come back and it will be quite a commotion. Although we don’t know when and it will be sudden, we should be ready. I expect that we Christians will be surprised when Jesus comes back. It will be quite a jolt when He appears in the sky with shouting and trumpets, and the dead start coming up out of the grave. But we will quickly understand what is happening and know that our redemption has arrived. Most importantly, we will be ready, being at work and doing our Master’s will.

So, we don’t sleep as others do because we will be aware. We will be seeing the things coming to pass that the Bible tells us will come to pass and we will know that the time is near. Jesus wants us to pay attention to the signs. He told us in Matthew 24:32-33,“*Now learn the parable from the fig tree: as soon as its branch has become tender and sprouts its leaves, you know that summer is near; so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door*.”

As verse 7 lets us know, we do have to have literal sleep. There is certainly nothing wrong with sleeping. God made us that way, in His wisdom, so that our bodies could rest and rejuvenate. It is necessary for our lives and well-being. As Paul mentions, that is what night time is for. That’s when we sleep. But *those who get drunk get drunk at night*. The evil-doer is busy when the Christian is sleeping.

The return of the Lord will be a time of terror for the non-believer. It will be a time of rejoicing and reunion for the believer. What a huge difference in reaction for the same event. Christian, the return of Jesus ought to be a time of joy for us; just be sure to be at your work, so your Master will be pleased with you upon His return.

Prayer

Gracious Lord, You are so good to give us plenty of warning in Your word. We know that You are coming back and only we who belong to You will be safe. You have told us of many things to watch for: changes in nature, changes in people, increase in evil. While in Your wisdom, You have not told us everything, You have told us enough.

How good and pleasant it would be to be hard at work when You return; bearing You much fruit so that You can receive a bountiful harvest. You know, Lord, that is not our natural inclination. We humbly ask for the constant help of the Holy Spirit. We need Him to keep us focused and working on those things You have for us to do.

Lord, we pray for this Your church, and for all Your church throughout the world. Strengthen Your people so that we may steadfastly cling to Your word; to all that is pleasing to You. May we be shining lights reflecting Jesus as Saviour, to a dark and despairing world.

It is in Jesus’ name we pray

Amen