

Prayers

To God

Praise the Lord for His provision for you; His advice, His wisdom, His care, His plans, and His vast resources by which your body and soul are fed.

For myself

Weekly theme: Food and eating

Pray for the courage to refuse what you should not eat or drink, and the courage to eat and drink those things that are good for you, and you know it.

For others

In a world where people make their own decisions and so often get things disastrously wrong, dear Lord, show us what is right. In a world where nations find it hard to agree on anything for the common good of humanity, dear Lord, show us what is good for us. In a world where families often fight and husbands and wives find it easier to divorce, dear Lord, show us how to love each other. For You are the one source of all truth, the independent judge of what is right, and the loving arbiter of all our troubles. Thank You, Lord God, **AMEN**

Meditation

Glory! The clouds have lifted and my spirit bursts with joy!
Nothing can alter the destiny I've been given,
And all the things within my life right now
Prepare me for a glory, sure, and yet to be revealed!

Praise! My soul would strike at every barrier opposing me
May worship fill my soul throughout this very day!
Nothing stops the heart's outpouring of intent, for
The victory of salvation may be dead to some but not to me!

Wonder! The precious sound of all I love grows stronger
As by Your gracious love the past comes clean.
Ignite the fires of passion deep within my heart,
So I may grasp the fullest meaning of my life, for ever!

Bible Passage

Thessalonians 5:1-5

¹ Now concerning the times and the seasons, fellow believers, you have no need to be written to. ² For you know with accuracy that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

³ When they say, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come on them, as labor pains come to a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape!

⁴ But you, fellow believers, are not in such darkness that the day will surprise you like a thief; ⁵ for you are all children of light and children of the day. Neither are we of the night or of darkness.

Review

At the end of the previous chapter, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about what he believed would happen at the moment of Christ's coming again, and our reading follows on from this. In what we have read today, Paul takes up the theme, familiar from Jesus' own teaching (Matt 24:36f.), of the unpredictable nature of His return. He appears to have been directly influenced by Jesus because he uses many of Jesus' own words, such as, '*thief in the night*' (5:2 - Matt 24:43), '*labour pains*' (5:3 - '*birth pangs*' Matt 24:8), and the idea that there is '*no escape*' (5:3) from God's awesome works of power runs right through Jesus' teaching about the end times (e.g. Luke 21:9f.).

Paul's letter then adds a subtle message as he encouraged the believers at Thessalonica to stand firm in their faith (5:4,5). Having spoken of the time of Christ's coming as like a '*thief in the night*' (5:2), he calls on the Thessalonians to instead be '*children of the day*' (5:5). It seems that he wanted the church to focus on the task and mission in hand, which echoes Jesus' own teaching where he encourages his disciples to do the work of God for as long as they can; they are not to stop work because the End is coming, they are to work, '*while it is still day*' (John 9:4). We cannot know for certain what range of opinions there were amongst the Thessalonians about the return of Christ, but Paul's teaching was clear, and consistently close to the words of Jesus.

Going Deeper

Some who have studied 1 Thessalonians think that the Thessalonians were in danger of accepting wrong beliefs about the return of Christ, but this part of the letter does not suggest this. The reason Paul spoke about Christ's return in the first place was in order to clarify that those who died before Jesus came again would indeed be received into God's heaven (4:13f.). He dealt with this easily, and the general comments about Christ's return that follow in this passage (5:1f.) have a much lighter touch, which suggests that he was not worried about heresy in the church on this matter.

The times and the seasons

To begin with, Paul teaches about the '*times and the seasons*' (5:1). His point is that there is '*no need*' (5:1) for the Christian to be worried about the timing of Christ's return; this will happen when we are least expecting it, not when we are most expecting it (5:2)! But the

interesting feature of his teaching here is Paul's use of the two words '*times and seasons*' (5:1).

The two Greek words used by Paul are '*chronos*' and '*kairos*', which together encompass everything we could mean by the modern word 'time'. The word '*chronos*', from which we get the word 'chronological' means a sequence of time, like that measured by a clock or a sun dial (in ancient times). Differently, the word '*kairos*' refers to a moment of time, that is, an event or an opportunity, as is meant by the expression '*the time will come when ...*'. In Paul's day, the two words were used somewhat interchangeably, just as the word 'time' is used today, and in this passage, Paul uses both words simply to convey the idea that whether we think of Christ's return as a single historical event or the completion of a sequence of events we might think of as 'God's plan', the end result is the same.

But we do not spot that Paul is playing on the words '*chronos*' and '*kairos*' here. In verse 2, he says that the Thessalonians know '*with accuracy*' that the time (*chronos*) of Christ's coming cannot be known with any accuracy! It doesn't work in English, but a Greek speaker might have smiled to hear this! I doubt that Paul would have used it if he was trying to make a serious point or defend the faith against a heresy!

The really tough message

From Paul's day to this, the tough message about Christ's return is not the when and the where of it, but what will happen. Here, Paul says that God's coming will be like a destruction, and he quotes the words of Jesus saying that there will be no escape from the wrath of God (see quotes above). Firstly, destruction comes as a result of God's judgement of the earth and all within it.

Secondly, the picture of labour pains in a pregnant woman is not simply a phrase to conjure up sympathy for women who are pregnant when Christ returns; as if the child to be born is somehow not to be regarded as a saved person who can meet the Lord in the air! No, we must think instead of the Biblical picture of God's imminent action, used throughout Scripture. The birth of a child is used by Isaiah to warn King Ahaz that God's plan is set in motion and will unfold without question because it is God's plan (Isaiah 7:13,14), and the same prophecy is now seen by Christians as a prophecy of Jesus' coming as 'Immanuel'! Throughout history, God had done a new work amongst His people by sending a child to do God's will, Isaac, Moses, Samuel, and more.

The message is this; though we do not know God's plan, it will unfold as He has prophesied and we cannot escape its consequences. But he assumes that Christians will not waste their time trying to pre-judge and pre-guess God when He has expressly told His followers that they will not be able to do it!

Live in the light

The serious message to be taken from this passage it is this; we are to live as, '*children of the light and the day*' (5:4). This idea conjures up a picture of getting on with life and doing things, openly, energetically and enthusiastically, and this is exactly what Paul wanted the Thessalonians to take from his letter. It was probably the main message of the entire letter.

Throughout his ministry, Paul taught the urgency of pursuing God's mission of preaching the Gospel and extending the Kingdom of God. He was himself driven by the need to give other people the chance to respond to the Gospel, and do God's will by bringing His light to places of the world that must have seemed very dark indeed to him at that time. These themes are unmistakable in most of his letters (e.g. see Romans 10), and as we move towards the end of his letter, we will find that they come through strongly here in 1 Thessalonians.

Discipleship

Application

Light and darkness

It is unfortunate that the church today often separates out those who wish to follow in Paul's footsteps and work 'in the day' whilst there is still time, and call them 'evangelicals'. It is even more tragic that some Christians simply do not believe that Christ will return or that God will bring His Creation to an end just as He began it. Personally, I liken this to the state of 'darkness' mentioned here by Paul in verse 5; it is a state of refusing to be lit by the light of God by which such teaching is accepted and acted upon. God's purpose is that all people should have a chance to respond to His love, and as we explore this task we live in His light. We let our '*light shine*' into the world instead of hiding it '*under a light shade*' (Matt 5:15,16))

Confidence in the message of Christ's return

The whole subject of Christ's coming again always raises passions in the church. Many believe Scripture, but there are many who find it hard and refuse to read passages such as this as anything more than ancient thoughts about a subject that has passed its relevance. But for me, the end of time and the conclusion of the world is a matter of simple logic. I might assume that the world will last beyond my lifetime, but the scientific evidence now at our disposal is rather uncertain about this, certainly about how long our planet is capable of sustaining life at the current rate of human living and population.

Even if this was not a current topic of debate, I still believe that God has made the world, and He will not only redeem it from its current state of corruption and decay, but He will save it completely by drawing it to a close and remaking it. It is surely best to be ready for this at any time, whether or not it happens in our own lifetime.

Ideas for what to do

- Read through verse 3 again, and reflect on what it says about people believing that there will be 'peace and security' before 'sudden destruction' comes. What does this mean to you? Pray about it and talk to others.
- Using any Bible tools at your disposal (from the headings in your Bible to a concordance) make a list of the places in the Bible where the coming of Christ in glory, or the end of the world is mentioned (apart from the Revelation of John). Keep this to hand, it can be a helpful reference in your Bible.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Compare what Paul says in this passage with what Jesus says in Matthew 24:36f. and find the equivalent references.
2. Discuss whether some Christians today live in a 'dark' state (see 5:4) whereby they would be surprised if Christ came again.
3. How can we best live as 'children of the light', and what do you think this means?

Final Prayer

Stay with us, Lord God, through all the dangers and perils of this day. We ask that we might hold on to You by faith and never let You down; and we ask that You hold on to us with all the might of Your love and Your Holy Spirit. So when the day ends, we ask for the gifts of Your rest and Your peace; thank You, Lord God. AMEN