

1st THESSALONIANS

5:1-11

Introduction

The top-five ways you know you are *not* a morning person:

#5 – When you sleep late, coffee prices plummet on major world commodity markets.

#4 – When you wake up there are people with wooden stakes and hammers in your bedroom.

#3 - You have to stop at the store every day after work to buy a new alarm clock.

#2 - You pay more for coffee everyday than gas.

And the number one way you know you are not a morning person:

#1 - You think David Letterman is the host of *Good Morning America*.

I don't know if the apostle Paul was a morning person or not... But in our text he argued that **all Christians** are morning people with regards to Bible prophecy:

1. "You," he said (addressing Christians), "are all sons of light and sons of the day..."
2. "They," he said (addressing non-Christians), "are of the night... [and] darkness."

A "day" is coming, called "the Day of the Lord." It is coming "like a thief" with "sudden destruction." It is a day of "wrath." It **will not** "overtake" Christians who are living in the "light" because they have "obtained salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." It **will** "come upon" non-Christians living in the "night" and "they shall not escape."

The Bible has several names for this Day of the Lord. You know part of it by its most popular name, the Great Tribulation. The Great Tribulation is that future seven-year period of time during which God pours-out His wrath upon the earth in one last effort to save men and

women from eternal judgment, and to prepare the earth for the return of Jesus Christ.

The Thessalonians were confused. They knew two things about the Lord's coming:

1. They knew that the Lord was coming **for** them in the Rapture.
2. And they knew the Lord was coming **with** them in His return to establish His kingdom on the earth

But there was also the Day of the Lord preceding the Lord's coming. Would they go through it? Were they already in it? The answer to both of those questions is an emphatic "**No!**"

Christians of the Church Age have **no part** in **any part** of the Great Tribulation. We will be Raptured and taken to heaven before it begins.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 If You Are A Christian You Are A "Light" Person Appointed To The Rapture, and #2 If You Are Not A Christian You Are A "Night" Person Appointed To Wrath.

#1 If You Are A Christian You Are
A "Light" Person Appointed To The Rapture
(v1-5)

Paul was addressing various questions that had arisen since he left Thessalonica some months earlier. Chapter five begins with his answer to their questions about the **timing** of the End Times: The Rapture, the Day of the Lord, the Second Coming of Jesus, and the kingdom of heaven on earth.

1 Thessalonians 5:1 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you.

Everything will make more sense to you when you realize that "the times and the seasons" is an important prophetic phrase. It only occurs two other times in the Bible:

1. It first occurs in the Old Testament Book of Daniel. Daniel was a captive in King Nebuchadnezzar's court in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that completely freaked him out! He saw a great image with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet partly of iron and partly of clay. In his dream a stone struck the image on its feet and broke them into pieces. The stone then became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. Nebuchadnezzar wanted the interpretation of the dream; but he didn't trust his wise men so he asked them to first tell him the dream then interpret it to prove they knew what they were talking about! If they couldn't first tell him what he had dreamed, he was going to kill all the wise men. Now Daniel was considered one of the kings "wise men." He got wind of it and said it was no problem for God to tell him both the dream and its interpretation. He interpreted the image in the dream to represent the succession of human kingdoms on the earth until the return of Jesus Christ to crush them and establish the kingdom of God on the earth. As he interpreted the dream, Daniel said, "God... changes **the times and the seasons**; He removes kings and raises up kings..." There's the first use of the phrase.
2. The next use of this phrase is in the New Testament Book of Acts. Jesus was about to ascend into heaven from the Mount of Olives. His disciples were a little confused about the timing of End Times events. They asked Jesus, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" What kingdom were they talking about? *They were talking about the kingdom prophesied by Daniel.* Jesus answered them and said, "**It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.**"

This phrase, "the times and the seasons," is a technical phrase that looks forward to the return of Jesus to crush the kingdoms of men and establish the kingdom of God on the earth.

The Old Testament prophets and the Lord Jesus both said that His return to crush the kingdoms of men and establish the kingdom of God on the earth would be preceded by a time of unprecedented tribulation on the earth. We call it the Great Tribulation, but in the Old Testament it was called "the Day of the Lord."

Two of the characteristics of the Day of the Lord are given in verses two and three: It's *beginning* is sudden and unexpected and it's *end* is certain and unavoidable.

1 Thessalonians 5:2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

1 Thessalonians 5:3 For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

The Day of the Lord begins suddenly and is unexpected. It is like the coming of "a thief in the night." Calvary Chapel of Kingsburg is a mobile church like we used to be. They keep their equipment in an enclosed trailer locked in a garage... *Or they used to!* It was stolen by a thief in the night unexpectedly.

Jesus is *not* the thief in the night! It is a bad metaphor to apply to the Lord. Are you ever excited to have a thief rob you? Does it bring joy to your heart? Jesus is not the thief.

The Day of the Lord begins unexpectedly when people are saying "Peace and safety." The most detailed teaching on the Day of the Lord is in the Revelation of Jesus Christ, in chapters six through nineteen. The Day of the Lord begins when a world leader signs and enforces a peace treaty in the Middle East. We know this man as the antiChrist; but the world will herald him as a political and military genius who has finally resolved the age-long conflict in the Middle East, bringing "peace and safety."

What the people on earth will actually experience is "sudden destruction... as labor pains upon a pregnant woman." Once the seven-year Tribulation begins it will follow a very definite course. Like a woman in labor, it cannot be stopped; and the pain will come in ever-increasing cycles. It will be awful; terrible. Jesus said it would be trouble like the world had never known before, nor ever would again. If He didn't return at the end of it, all mankind would be destroyed.

We need to read the end of verse three with verse four:

1 Thessalonians 5:3 ... And **they** shall not escape.

1 Thessalonians 5:4 But **you, brethren**, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.

"They shall not escape. But you, brethren..." The "you" are *believers*, Christians; "they" are *unbelievers*, non-Christians. This is a clear and unmistakable contrast. Unbelievers "shall not escape" this "Day"; it will "overtake" them.

But you will escape and it won't overtake you!

1 Thessalonians 5:4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.

1 Thessalonians 5:5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.

If you are a Christian, you are a "son of light and... of the day." If you are not a Christian, you are "of the night" and "darkness."

The Bible describes the world as a kingdom of darkness. Jesus came as a "light [shining] in the darkness" (John 1:5). Jesus declared, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life" (John 8:12). When a person makes a decision to trust Jesus Christ to be their Savior from sin they are "rescued... from the domain of darkness, and transferred... to the kingdom of [God's] Son" (Colossians 1:13). Those who "were formerly darkness... now are light in the Lord" (Ephesians 5:8). God has "called [you] out of darkness into His marvelous light" (First Peter 2:9).

In the Old Testament, the Day of the Lord is described as a day of darkness (Joel 2:2; Zephaniah 1:15). It is a time of judgment specifically for people in the kingdom of darkness who have rejected the Light of the world. It is for night people, not light people! Believers therefore need never fear that the Day of the Lord will "overtake" them.

The Rapture of the Church will occur prior to any part of the Day of the Lord. The Church is removed; then the Great Tribulation can begin upon the earth. The Great Tribulation prepares the people on the earth for the Second Coming of Jesus. He returns and establishes His kingdom on the earth for a thousand years.

As far as the Church is concerned: Jesus will return for you in the Rapture prior to the Great Tribulation, and then He will return to earth with you after the Great Tribulation.

#2 If You Are Not A Christian You Are
A "Night" Person Appointed To Wrath
(v6-11)

The word "wrath" is a key. Drop down to verses nine and ten for a moment:

1 Thessalonians 5:9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

1 Thessalonians 5:10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

The word "wrath" describes God's judgment upon sinners. The Day of the Lord is a day of God's wrath. As clearly as he could, Paul said, "God did not appoint us to wrath." Believers have **no part** in the Day of the Lord.

I've heard Christians teach that the Church must go through the Tribulation in order to be purified. You are purified by the Word of God! The Tribulation is not to purify saints; it is to judge sinners and prepare Jews for the return of Jesus. Many millions will be saved in response to the preaching of the Gospel; they will have to endure the catastrophes on planet earth as well as severe persecutions.

But not you – if you have made your decision to follow Jesus prior to the Day of the Lord. You "obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." He "died for us." That means He took your place. He took your place when He died on the Cross. The wrath of God against your sin was already poured-out upon Jesus as He hung on the Cross at Calvary. You cannot ever experience God's wrath if you are saved.

Paul added in verse ten that "whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with [Jesus]." This looks back to his teaching on the Rapture in chapter four. Those who "sleep" are believers who have died prior to the Rapture. They are living together with Jesus right now in heaven. We who remain alive will be caught-up prior to the

Day of the Lord and be living together with them and Jesus while the Tribulation is occurring on the earth.

The "night" people, the unbelievers, have an appointment with God's wrath. It is avoidable... But inevitable if they go on rejecting the Lord's gracious offer of salvation.

Prophecy ought to be practical. Having contrasted "light" people and "night" people, Paul made some practical applications in verses six through eleven. We are in the kingdom of light, but we are living on the earth among those groping in the realm of darkness. Two things should characterize our lives as believers in contrast to unbelievers; you see them in verses six and seven,

1 Thessalonians 5:6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do*, but let us watch and be sober.

1 Thessalonians 5:7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.

We should be *sleepless* and we should be *sober*.

Sleepless: In chapter four the word "sleep" described the physical death of believers. The word here is a different word; it means *moral indifference*.

Here is the problem: The "night" that surrounds us as believers has a tendency to lull us into moral indifference. If you are not careful, you begin to yawn and then you doze-off. You cannot afford to yawn in the face of sin; you certainly can't afford to fall asleep.

Sober: Neither can you afford to be "drunk." "Drunk" refers to the influence of intoxicants. Certainly alcohol and drugs are included; but there are many other kinds of intoxicants in the world – power, pleasure, pride, possessions, and promotion to name a few. You cannot afford to be under the influence of the world's intoxicants; you must remain sober.

You should see yourself as sleepless and sober until the coming of the Lord. Paul gave an illustration: You are like a soldier on sentry.

1 Thessalonians 5:8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.

The soldier on sentry cannot sleep; and he must be sober. You are that spiritual soldier. You are always "on-duty," as long as you live in the kingdom of darkness.

Some of your armor is described. "Putting on" is in a verb-tense that means *put it on and leave it on*. There is no furlough, not even any rest for you as a soldier on sentry.

Your "breastplate" is "faith and love." It is a description of both sides of the breastplate. On the inside, faith; on the outside, love. Faith is the proper heart-attitude toward Jesus Christ. Love is the proper heart-activity toward His saints and all men in general.

Your "helmet" is "the hope of salvation." Your hope on earth is that Jesus is coming any moment to take you home either through your death or in the Rapture; but in either case you will be with Him and not be subject to the Day of wrath. Thus you are protected from the things of the world which seek to overcome you – knowing that the world is passing away.

Let's take one more quick look at verses nine and ten:

1 Thessalonians 5:9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

1 Thessalonians 5:10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

These two verses summarize the whole section that began in verse thirteen of chapter four. Here is my own thematic paraphrase:

"If you are a Christian you have no part in the Day of Wrath; God's wrath against your sin was already poured-out upon Jesus when He took your place on the Cross and died to save you. Whether you die or are alive at His coming for the Church, He is going to take you home to heaven before the Day of Wrath begins."

Conclusion

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

"Comfort" means *come alongside to strengthen*. "Edify" means *build-up*. The picture I get is of a structure that has been damaged in some way, perhaps by some natural disaster. It first needs to be strengthened; then it can be rebuilt.

Christians are bound to get damaged out in the world. There are many "natural disasters" we succumb to whenever we fall asleep or fail to remain sober.

Let's come alongside one another. First, to assess and repair any damage; then to encourage one another to be built-up.