

1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

“THE DAY OF THE LORD”

In July, 1994 astronomers were treated to a spectacle in the skies - a cosmic demolition derby. Twenty chunks of a shattered comet named Shoemaker-Levy 9 smashed into the planet Jupiter. Massive hunks of ice and rock hit the Jovian atmosphere at 134,000 mph. It was a deep impact. When Fragment G hit, the planet released a fireball - a gaseous plume, 5000 miles wide by 1600 miles high. The force of the explosion was equivalent to 6 million megatons of TNT – that’s 100,000 times the power of the largest nuclear bomb ever detonated on planet Earth. Glenn Orton, an astronomer at the California Jet Propulsion Laboratory made the comment, *"It was like God striking the planet."* Indeed!

Of course the fireworks on Jupiter stirred speculation. Could similar cosmic debris smash into our planet? And the answer is a definite *"Yes."* In fact, not only can it, the phenomena occurs everyday. The Earth gets a daily sprinkling of over 20 tons of cosmic rock. Most of the 20 tons is space dust the size of a grain of sand. *You really do have stardust in your hair.* But scientists also have evidence of larger strikes.

Geologists have documented 140 craters in different places around the globe - that are the result of incoming asteroids, comets, or meteors. In 1908 a comet exploded in a remote region of Siberia. In 1993 a tractor-trailer-sized asteroid passed within 90,000 miles of the Earth. That’s less than half the distance between the Earth and moon - a close call according to astronomical standards. According to CBS News, Astronomers estimate there’re 400,000 Near Earth Objects, or NEOs, up to 1000 meters wide, that could strike the Earth with little or no warning.

It may surprise you but the Bible predicts that one day God will judge the Earth by striking this perverse planet with an extra-terrestrial projectile. Revelation 8 describes the fireworks that will one day be a reality... *"Something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the living creatures in the sea died. And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and the name of the star is Wormwood; and a third of the waters became (bitter); and many men died from the water. And I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, 'Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth...'"* As Glen Orton put it, *"It was like God striking the planet."*

Here’s what no one today wants to admit... God sees mankind’s sin and rebellion. He sees the blatant disregard for *His Word* in *His own world*. God sees mankind’s snotty arrogance - our militant secularism - our shameless perversions. And trust me, God won’t sit silent forever. A day of reckoning is on the horizon. It’s almost high noon at the OK Corral! God will shake the pillars of the universe to get our attention. He will bring *the arrogant planet* to its knees.

Years ago I read where Ladbroke’s, a London bookmaker, was giving 40 to 1 odds that an alien will visit our planet in the near future. At that time, if a visitor had dropped in it would’ve cost Ladbroke’s half-a-million dollars. The truth of the matter is that one day they’ll be forced to pay up! The Earth will be invaded by an extraterrestrial visitor – and His name is Jesus Christ! There are more biblical passages that promise Jesus’ second coming than promised His first... Someone counted 2,163 references.

Currently, we live in an age when mankind is getting *his way* – he’s having *his say*. Today is called “**The Day of Man.**” Mankind rules the roost. Yet the Bible teaches that the sun will set on “**The Day of Man**” - and a new day will dawn on Earth. A time where God will have *His say*, and insist on *His way* in the affairs of men. God will shut up the opinions of men. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, is coming back to clean house. He’ll judge evildoers. He’ll right all wrongs. He’ll return to establish His Kingdom. In our text, Paul refers to this period as, “**The Day of the Lord.**”

I’ve told this story before, but it bears repeating, whenever my dad taught 5th Grade Sunday School he had an interesting way to ease into his lesson. Before he commenced he’d opened the floor, “**Okay boys, anybody can say anything they’d like. You can talk about any subject you suggest.**” Of course, when given the opportunity no one had anything to say. Then dad would open up his Bible and tell the class, “**Alright, I’ve given you young men a chance to talk and I’ve sat here respectfully and listened to you. Now it’s my turn to talk and I expect you to sit here respectfully and listen to me...**” This is what God is going to say at the end of the age! Today, He’s sitting back listening to our foolishness and blasphemy. But the day is coming when it’s His turn. Trust me, God will get the last word!

Paul begins in verse 1, “**But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 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.**” Understand, when we talk about “**The Day of the Lord**” we’re not defining a 24 hour period. In history we often speak of “**the Day of Rome’s Republic,**” or “**the Day of the Industrial Revolution,**” or “**the Day of Space Exploration.**” Rome was a republic for 500 years, not just for 24 hours. The term “day” can speak of an indefinite period of time.

The bookends for “**The Day of the Lord**” are the rapture of the Church at the start, and the New Heaven and the New Earth as the grand finale’. In between there’s *the marriage supper of the Lamb - the rise of the Antichrist - seven years of Great Tribulation - the Battle of Armageddon - the Coming of Christ in power and great glory - the salvation of Israel - the judgment of the nations - the Millennial Reign of Christ – the Battle with Magog - a universal inferno – and the Great White Throne of Judgment...* These proceedings cover a time frame of a little more than 1000 years. Here in 1 Thessalonians 5 Paul is concerned about the onset of these events. He wants the Church to be ready for the miracle he describes at the end of chapter 4. We call it the “**rapture.**” Jesus will return to snatch up His Church. He wants us living our lives in anticipation of the Lord’s return.

After all my criticism last week of Harold Camping and his erroneous date setting, this week God revealed to me the exact time of the rapture! That’s right... Jesus will return at precisely **2:00 AM**. I’m certain! Write it in ink. Somewhere on Earth, it’ll be **2:00 AM** when the Church goes up. Actually, we learned last week from Jesus Himself that no one knows the exact moment of the rapture. In Mark 13:32, Jesus says, “**But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.**” No one knows the *exact day* or *specific hour*, but here in verse 1 Paul does tell us we should know “**the times and the seasons.**”

I’ll never forget the Sunday morning Kathy gave birth to Zach. She was nine months pregnant – *great with child*. She resembled one those hot air balloons in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade. My skinny little wife was so inflated I held her down with ropes so she wouldn’t float off. It was obvious my wife was going to have a baby – *and sooner rather than later...*

But that Sunday morning her water broke! And my oh my, it was a surprise to us both... We were sure the day was coming... She had a bag packed for weeks... but when the moment arrived it shocked us both... Here's how Paul tells us "*The Day of the Lord*" begins... "*as labor pains upon a pregnant woman...*" You know it's on the horizon – you can tell "*the times and the seasons*" - but when the event actually occurs it's a stunner.

The Bible is full of signposts that indicate we're nearing the last days... For starters, the rebirth of the nation Israel is unprecedented in the annals of human history. A people in exile, that hadn't existed as a nation for 1900 years, is reborn. A desert blooms. A language rises from ashes. The modern Israeli people are a proof of God's faithfulness. It reminds me of the pagan King of Prussia. He asked Count Zinzendorf, "*Can you prove to me your faith?*" Zinzendorf replied with two words, "*The Jew.*"

We could go on and on noting signs... *The Zionist movement to relocate Jews to Israel... plans to rebuild a Jewish Temple... the Israeli-Arab peace process... the reunification of Europe... unrest with Persia, aka Iran... A intensifying momentum for global government and a one-world economy... A preponderance of earthquakes, and disease, and famine, and natural disasters... A proliferation of knowledge and technology...* I can take you to chapter and verse and show you the Bible prophesies. And these are just a few of the phenomena that will signal the end. Canvas today's news and you'll recognize "*the times and the seasons...*"

Besides, if Jesus doesn't return soon, God will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah. The world is growing more and more perverse by the second. If God doesn't intervene soon, we'll annihilate ourselves. The world is so pregnant with judgment it's about to pop.

And according to Paul when the "*Day of the Lord*" begins it comes like a mom's initial contractions. It starts suddenly. Jesus descends in the clouds to snatch away His Church. *Even though we know He's coming it's still a surprise.* The day comes "*as a thief in the night.*" It happens unexpectedly. A burglar doesn't make an appointment, or send out a notice a few days before the heist. He waits until you least expect him, and then he pounces. This is why you need to be a rapture watcher. We see the end time scenarios like a storm brewing and forming in the distance, but the first thunder clap is the rapture of the Church. Paul encourages us to be ready.

But notice what follows - **as believers go up, judgment comes down.** Read again verse 2, "*When they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them...*" The world is barreling toward judgment. Notice, a pseudo-peace precedes this "*sudden destruction.*" Before the ink dries on the paper, peace treaties will be broken and Israel attacked.

On September 29, 1938, Great Britain signed a treaty with Germany. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain gave Adolf Hitler a slice of land from his neighbor, Czechoslovakia. In exchange Hitler promised be no more aggression. The British Press hailed the agreement as "**peace in our time.**" *They were seriously duped.* Six months later Hitler had taken over all of Czechoslovakia. In less than a year, the Nazis were marching on Poland.

One day, Israel will make a similar mistake. They'll be charmed by the promise of shalom or peace. Another dynamic leader, like Hitler – the Bible calls him the Antichrist - will smooth talk the Jews to the treaty table. But their partner in peace has evil motives. They'll enter **a sinister shalom.** The Bible has much to say about this future peace treaty...

Isaiah 28:18 calls it “a covenant with death,” and “your agreement with (Hell).” Daniel speaks of a future leader who’ll rise up against God. Chapter 8:25 tells us, “Through his cunning he shall cause deceit to prosper...” Daniel 9:27 even pinpoints this peace treaty’s place on the timeline.

Notice Paul warns, “*When they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction...*” Acts 17:30 speaks of God’s patience. Paul says “*these times of ignorance God overlooked...*” Today, God blinks at sin. Not because he approves of what he sees, or is afraid to judge sinners, but it isn’t time. Daniel 9 tells us God has set aside a future seven year period to judge the rebel planet. He has reserved the harshest judgments for the end of the age. The Bible even has a name for this period. It’s “*Great Tribulation.*” Today the world persecutes the Church. But in that day, God will pour out His wrath on the world, and take the wicked to the woodshed. Terrible, fearful judgments will rock the Third Rock. They’ll make *the Chernobyl meltdown, Japanese Tsunami, Haitian earthquake* - look like child’s play.

At the moment, man is riding his high horse. But he’s going to get shot down. Soon God will intervene. Revelation teaches us that the title deed to the Earth is sealed with seven seals. When Jesus takes possession He’ll pop the seals and serious judgments will unleash... Seven trumpets will sound out additional punishment... Then seven bowls pour out still more... People will run for cover. They’ll try to commit suicide to escape - *but God won’t allow it.* Expect a full scale assault on sinners. God knocks man off his *high horse*, and Jesus will return with His saints on a *white horse!* This isn’t metaphor, or symbolism, or Si-fi - this is the Bible’s prophetic forecast for a future seven years on planet Earth. It’ll be *Great Tribulation.*

And Daniel 9:27 gives us the benchmark. We’re told when these seven years begin... When Israel signs this false peace – this **sinister shalom**. “*When they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction...*” “*The Day of the Lord*” begins with the rapture. Jesus comes “*as a thief*” - unexpectedly for His Church The world is lulled to sleep by a fake peace. Everyone thinks, *better days are ahead.* Good riddance to the Christians. But half-way through the seven years, Israel’s treaty gets broken. God takes vengeance on a world who betrays His people. He ramps up His judgments. Finally, Jesus returns to save Israel and establish His Kingdom.

Before we go further let me clear up some possible confusion... In 1 Thessalonians 4 Jesus returns before this sudden destruction – *in the clouds* - to snatch up His Church to heaven and deliver us from His coming wrath... But other biblical passages teach that Jesus will return at the end of the judgments - to rescue the Jews, and punish His enemies, and establish His kingdom on the Earth. He’ll reign and rule for 1000 years. That means there’re actually two second comings of Christ... One is **before the destruction - in the clouds - for the Church - the world is struggling for an explanation...** The other is **after the destruction - on the earth - to rescue His people Israel - and the world recognizes it’s Jesus...**

Of course there are folks who see only one second coming. Jesus will *rapture His Church* and *rebuild His Kingdom* at the same time. They believe the Church will have to endure God’s fierce judgments. But not so! This is NOT what Paul teaches us throughout 1 Thessalonians... Recall 1:10, he commends the believers for “*turning from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*” We aren’t *destined for God’s wrath* – we are *delivered from God’s wrath.* The Thessalonians were taking it on the chin from the world around them. But Jesus would return to deliver them from “*the wrath to come.*”

Certainly, God uses tribulation in our discipleship. It's the opposition we encounter from this world that builds endurance and purifies our faith. Yes, we're subject to this world's animosity toward the Church, but that's a far cry from being subject to God's animosity toward this world. As Lot was escorted out of Sodom before it was destroyed, the Church will be delivered from the day when God pours out His wrath on this world. Paul says it again here in 5:9, "God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." If you know Jesus, this Great Tribulation is not in your future. We're saved *from wrath to salvation*.

And this idea is not only taught in 1 Thessalonians, but elsewhere in Scripture. In Revelation 3:10 Jesus promises the faithful church, "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth." They're kept from the global tribulation that's to come. In contrast, Jesus says to an unfaithful church, "I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds." Her punishment is Great Tribulation. But implied is that the Church was not intended for God's end time judgments.

In fact, there's an obscure prophesy in Isaiah 26 I believe is an invitation to the Church to be ready for the rapture... "Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation is past. For behold, the LORD comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity..." Here's the beauty of our salvation – it's multi-faceted... We're saved from sin - saved from the Law - saved from Judgment - saved from the world - saved from hell... but we're also "*delivered from the wrath to come*."

Notice too, the last line in verse 3, "*They shall not escape...*" Folks who are duped into accepting the false peace and end up suffering sudden destruction "*shall not escape...*" But Paul's implication is that some will! That's why he's writing to the Thessalonians. God provides His Church a Great Escape. That's why they need to discern "*the seasons*" and stay rapture ready. Listen for the shout and trumpet, and be caught up to Jesus!

Hey, the next prophetic event to take place is the rapture of the Church. Nothing needs to happen before Jesus calls us home. It's the next benchmark on the timeline. "*The Day of the Lord*" begins with the rapture.

The Bible teaches what theologians call "*the doctrine of Imminency*." Jesus' return for the Church is **imminent** – *it can happen at any moment*. This is why I believe in the Pre-Tribulational Rapture of the Church. If the rapture doesn't occur before the Great Tribulation; then it's not imminent. We can count off seven years. We'll be able to chart it out to the very day. Harold Camping will be back in business! *God forbid!* That's why I'm not on the look out for *judgment*. Any day, I'm expecting to see *Jesus!*

And this is why Paul stirs us up in verse 4, "*But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day.*" A believer in Jesus isn't in the dark. The means by which I become a Christian introduces me to truths about God. The instant I'm saved I'm ushered into the light. I wake up to the day! I learn Jesus is all about *deliverance*... Grace is all about *escaping wrath*... Faith is all about *not being overtaken*... We should know better than to think we're destined for judgment. Jesus provides a Great Escape.

Paul continues, “We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do*, but let us watch and be sober.” In chapter 4 we talked about the believers who’d died – their soul lives with Jesus, but their body still sleeps in the grave. This “*sleep*” implies a peaceful, restful state. But the word “*sleep*” in verse 6 is a different word. It implies a deadening of the senses. The Dictionary definition reads, “to yield to sloth and sin... to be indifferent to your salvation...” This is a guy who slumbers his life away. He doesn’t care about eternal realities.

This word “*sleep*” implies three traits... **Insensitivity** - to God and His Word... **Inactivity** - no desire to serve God... **In danger** – a man asleep is defenseless and vulnerable to attack... Some of us have dozed off spiritually. This morning, I’m trying to *shake you up* and *wake you up*. I hope this Bible Study is a strong cup of coffee.

Once a little boy went to say his bedtime prayers and got tongue-tied. Rather than his normal prayer, “If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.” He prayed, “If I should wake before I die...” That’s what we should be praying for some Christians – that they wake up spiritually before their life on earth is over. *Wake up* before *time’s up*!

It’s easy to discuss God’s final judgments when we do it in the abstract. But when we put a face on it – *Uncle Bob*, or *Jim next door*, or *Cousin Karen* – it’s a different story. Everyone alive at the time who doesn’t know Jesus will be subject to terrible judgments. Those of us who are sober, need to love our friends enough to *wake them up* before *their time is up*!

Years ago, I had a case of bad indigestion that I mistook for chest pains. It concerned me, so I decided to play it safe and consult a doctor. I suppose this doctor went to college, did some graduate work, even medical school... but I’ll never forget what he told me, “Well, it’s a good thing you came in today. A lot of people ignore the signs, just go to bed, and in the morning they wake up dead.” No joke. An educated man told me, “*They wake up dead.*” I immediately asked to see his diploma... No... The doc must’ve been speaking spiritually, for in a spiritual sense everyone will *wake up after they’re dead*. In eternity you’ll be fully aware you’ll see clearly God’s truth and your need for Jesus, but it’s too late once you’re dead. The idea is to wake up before you die, not afterwards.

Verse 7, “For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.” I’m sure you’ve heard, “Nothing good happens after midnight.” I’ve been singing that refrain to my kids for at least 20 years! And it’s true. Did you know 62% of sex crimes – 71% of car thefts happen at night. Evil people like to operate under the cover of darkness. *And the same is true spiritually...* If there’s sin in your heart you’ll run from God’s light and truth. You’ll avoid church and fellowship every chance you get. *Any excuse* becomes a *good excuse*. You’ll do all you can to stay as far from God as possible... *Let’s wake up and embrace God’s light!*

Paul says, “But let us who are of the day be sober...” I’m thinking of the guy who gets drunk one night - really tanked. He’s suffering a major league hangover. It’s past noon and he’s still in bed with the curtains closed. But Paul bursts into the bedroom – throws open the curtains – let’s the daylight pour in and soak up the room – he shakes his friend and starts an IV coffee drip... Paul is sobering up a friend, and this is what he does to us. *Have you been wasting time drunk on sin and asleep to God?* It’s time to *wake up*, and *get up*, and *wise up*, and *look up*... it’s time to join the day and live in the light of God’s Word. Your life will get better if you live it sober – that’s true literally and figuratively. Let’s sober up to God.

And once Paul gets his bud off of the Bud and out of the bed, he gets him dressed... Paul finds him and us some proper attire for the *heart*, and the *head*. He tells us, “*putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.*” - a *breastplate* and a *helmet*. A breastplate protects the *heart* – and the spiritual variety consists of “*faith and love.*” A cop would never go into a dangerous situation without a bullet proof vest - and neither should a Christian go anywhere without “*faith and love.*”

The heart is the seat of the desires. If you really desire a thing, you’ll say, “*I want that with all my heart.*” That’s why we should be careful what we love and what we believe in... Our heart follows the priorities we set. Jesus said, “*For where your treasure is there will your heart be also.*”

Understand, *the heart is a follower*. People who talk about following their heart have it backwards. They end up crushed, and confused. Following your heart is letting the tail wag the dog. You end up jerked around and played the fool. You need to tie your heart to “*faith and love.*” It astonishes me to hear someone’s life philosophy, “*I just follow my heart.*” This is so short-sighted. They don’t realize our heart attaches to what we love and believe. Rather than lead, it tags along behind what we think is important. Establish good priorities; then let your heart follow. This is why we need to wake up. Sober up. Decide what’s true. What do you believe in – Who are you committed to – then get your heart in line.

Cover your heart with “*faith and love*” – then use “*as a helmet the hope of salvation...*” Make sure your mind continually thinks salvation thoughts. I never forget being challenged by a quote I heard used in reference to CS Lewis. Someone described him, “*As the most thoroughly converted man he’d ever met.*” This is what I want to be... “*thoroughly Christian.*” I want to see myself in Christ. View life from God’s perspective. I want to see you through God’s eyes. I want biblical attitudes and godly habits. I need to believe I can change. *I need a case of salvation on the brain!*

One year Zach was the catcher on his baseball team, and they’d just come out with the new hockey-goalie-style catcher’s masks. It was the latest and greatest. I went to the store to pick one up for his Christmas gift. And I still remember the sticker shock - \$189 for a catcher’s mask. I decided against it. The old catcher’s mask would do... And I’m afraid that’s the choice many Christians make. Rather than think new thoughts – rather than let salvation color their thinking – they just continue in the old ruts. I’m sure you’ve heard it before... I think it was Albert Einstein who came up with the definition of insanity... “*Insanity is expecting the same thing, done the same way, will yield a different result.*” We need a new mindset.

And here’s the good news... even though spiritual head protection is expensive, it’s free to us. The “*helmet... of salvation*” was purchased by the blood of Jesus. Salvation and its ramifications are free, but we’ve got to strap it on. A catcher would never think of entering a game without a mask. And you and I will never be a victorious Christian without our helmet. Are you learning to think about yourself, and others, and life from a different angle – from God’s perspective? Keep the helmet on your head!

Verse 9, “*For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.*” *How hopeful*, whether our bodies “*wake or sleep...*” In essence, *dead or alive* we’ll live together with Jesus! This is a believer’s destiny - on earth or in heaven - to live with Jesus.

Verse 11 is fitting place to close, “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.” I know your life is tough. I know you bear some heavy burdens. But the tribulation you endure is nothing compared to the tribulation that will one day come upon this planet. Jesus is planning a surprise return – He’s coming for His Church... Be rapture ready. Be alert. Be awake. Be sober. Be comforted. Your destiny is to live with Jesus. You can start fulfilling that destiny today!