LESSONS FROM THE END OF THE AGE THE DAY OF THE LORD I THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

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. 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. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.

For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 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.

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. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

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. But scientists also have evidence of larger strikes. Geologists have documented 140 craters around the globe that are the result of incoming asteroids, or 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...

Currently, NASA is tracking as many as 4000 NEOs or "near Earth objects" streaking through space, that could strike the Earth with little to no warning.

Donald Yeomans, an astronomer at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, made this statement, "Space is filled with objects that threaten Earth... Earth runs its course about the sun in a swarm of asteroids. Sooner or later, our planet will be struck by one of the them."

Even now it's as if God keeps firing warning shots across the bow of our ship to encourage us to repent.

Several years ago, a National Geographic Special referred to these projectiles in biblical terms - it called them, "mountains tumbling through space."

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 mountain. Revelation 8 describes the fireworks that will one day be a reality...

John sounds like NASA, "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 (or bitterness); 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.

God sees the blatant disregard for *His Word*.

God sees mankind's snotty arrogance.

God sees our militant secularism.

God sees our shameless perversions.

And trust me, God won't sit silent forever. God will see to it that **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 Ladbrokes, 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 Ladbrokes \$500,000. They took a lot of bets. But the truth of the matter is that one day they will 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 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 this 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.

Our Lord will judge evildoers. He'll right all wrongs. He'll return to establish His Kingdom. In our text, Paul refers to this period of time as, "The Day of the Lord."

It reminds me of my dad. Whenever dad taught boys 5th Grade Sunday School he had an interesting way to ease into his lesson. Before he began he'd opened the floor, "Okay

boys, anybody can say anything they'd like. You can talk about any subject you want."

Of course, when given the opportunity to speak everybody sat silent... After a while, dad would open up his Bible, and say, "Alright then, I've given you boys 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..." And this is what God is going to say at the end of the age!

Today, He's sitting back listening to mankind's 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."

Realize, when we talk about *"The Day of the Lord"* we're not necessarily speaking of a 24 hour period.

In history class the professor might say "the Day of Rome's Republic," 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 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 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...

The proceedings included in "The Day of the Lord" 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 in the twinkling of an eye to snatch up His Church. He wants us living our lives in anticipation of Jesus' return.

Over the years I've been pretty critical of what I call **date setters.** People who claim to know when the rapture will take place. But this week God revealed to me the exact time of the rapture... That's right...

I had a special revelation. Here it is... **Jesus is going to return at precisely 2:00 AM!** Somewhere on Earth it'll be **2:00 AM** when the Church goes up.

Actually, no one knows the exact moment of the rapture. In Mark 13:32, Jesus Himself declares, "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 the *specific hour*, but Paul does tell us we should know *"the times and the seasons."* I'll never forget the Sunday morning my wife, Kathy gave birth to our first son. She was nine months pregnant - *great with child.* She looked like a hot air balloon in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade.

My skinny wife was so inflated I had to hold her down with ropes so she wouldn't fly off. It was obvious she was having 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...

And 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 it actually occurs it's a stunner.

The Bible is full of signposts that indicate we're at the end of the age... For starters, consider the rebirth of the nation Israel. A people in exile, that hadn't existed as a nation for 1900 years, was suddenly been reborn.

A desert blossomed overnight. Their language rose from the ashes. It's all unprecedented in the annals of human history. *And God predicted it all in advance.*

Modern Israel is a proof of God's faithfulness.

It reminds me of the pagan King of Prussia. One day, he asked Count Zinzendorf, "Can you prove to me your faith?" Zinzendorf replied with two words, *"The Jew."*

But 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 efforts... the reunification of Europe... unrest with Persia, aka Iran...

Momentum toward global government and a one-world economy... A preponderance of earthquakes, and disease, and famine, and natural disasters... Not to mention a proliferation of knowledge and technology...

I can take you to chapter and verse and show you the Bible's prophesies. And these are just a few of the phenomena that 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 new 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."* The rapture happens unexpectedly.

A burglar doesn't make an appointment with his victim, or sends out a notice a few days before the heist. He waits until you least expect him, and strikes.

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 wants us to be ready. But notice what follows - as believers go up, judgment comes down. Read verse 2, "When they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them..." The world is barreling toward judgment.

Notice, a pseudo-peace will precede this *"sudden destruction."* Before the ink dries on the paper, peace treaties will be broken and Israel will be attacked.

On September 29, 1938, Great Britain signed a treaty with Germany. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain agreed to let Adolf Hitler take a slice of land from his neighbor, Czechoslovakia. In exchange Hitler promised no more aggression. The British Press hailed the agreement as "Peace For Our Time."

But the Brits 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, much like Hitler - the Bible calls him *the Antichrist* - will smooth talk the Jews to the peace table. But their partner in peace has evil motives. They'll enter into a sinister shalom.

And 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. Daniel 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 current 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 just isn't time yet.**

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 of human history. It refers to it as, "The Great Tribulation."

Today, the world persecutes the Church. But in that day, God Himself will persecute this wicked world.

He'll take this world to the woodshed.

Terrible, fearful judgments will strike this planet that'll make natural disasters like the Chernobyl meltdown, and the Japan Tsunami, and the Haitian earthquake, and the Katrina hurricane - 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 be unleashed... Seven trumpets sound additional punishments... Then seven bowls pour out still more... People 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 will knock man off his *high horse*, and our Lord will return 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's called *Great Tribulation* for a reason!

"The Day of the Lord" begins with the rapture. Jesus comes *"as a thief in the night"* - unexpectedly for His Church. That's when the world gets lulled to sleep by a fake peace. Everyone thinks, *happy days are here again. Good riddance to Christians!* But *"When they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction..."*

Daniel 9:27 gives us the mark on the timeline for the Great Tribulation. The final seven years **begin** when Israel signs a peace treaty - this **sinister shalom**.

Half-way through the seven years, Israel's treaty gets broken. God takes vengeance on a world who's betrayed His people. He ramps up His judgments.

Finally, Jesus returns to rescue His people, Israel, and establish His long-awaited Kingdom on the earth.

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 His Church up to heaven and deliver us from His wrath...

But other Bible passages teach that Jesus will return at the end of these judgments - to rescue the Jews, punish His enemies, and establish His kingdom on the Earth. Jesus will reign a thousand years... That means there're actually **two** second comings of Christ...

One is before the destruction - in the clouds - for the Church - the world will struggle for an explanation...

The other is after the destruction - on the earth - to rescue 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... In 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." Notice, we aren't *destined for God's wrath* - rather, we are *delivered from God's wrath*.

At the moment the Thessalonians were taking it on the chin from the world around them. But when Jesus returns He'll 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*, but that's a far cry from being subject to *God's animosity* on this world.

As Lot was escorted out of Sodom before the city 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, 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* the Great Tribulation.

But implied is that the Church of Jesus Christ was not intended for God's end of the age judgments.

In fact, there's an obscure prophesy in Isaiah 26 that 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; (the snatching away) hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment (seven years), until the indignation (or Great Tribulation) is past. For behold, the LORD comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity..."

The beauty of our salvation is that it's multi-faceted...

We're saved from sin - from the Law - from guilt - from Judgment - from condemnation - from the world - from hell... but also *"from the wrath to come."*

Notice too, the last line here in 5:3, *"They shall not escape..."* Folks who are duped into accepting the false peace, and who suffer 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, the trumpet, and watch for Jesus! 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.

One of the great themes of the Bible is "the doctrine of Imminency." Jesus Christ's return for the Church is **imminent** - in essence, *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. If it's at the end of the Tribulation we can count off seven years.

We can chart it to the very day. That's why I'm not on the look out for *judgment*. I'm looking 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 save I'm ushered into His marvelous light. I wake up to the day!

I learn Jesus is all about *salvation*... 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 is all about deliverance!

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." Earlier in 1 Thessalonians Paul talked about the believers who had died - their soul was alive with Jesus, but their body was asleep in the grave. The word *"sleep"* implied a peaceful state.

But the term *"sleep"* in verse 6 is a different word.

It means a deadening of the senses. The Dictionary definition reads, "to yield to sloth and sin - to be indifferent to your salvation." Some people slumber their life away. They don't care about eternal realties.

This word *"sleep"* implies three traits... insensitivity and inactivity and endangerment... Insensitivity - to God and His Word... Inactivity - or no desire to serve the Lord... And endangerment - a man asleep is defenseless and vulnerable to spiritual attacks...

And some of us have dozed off spiritually.

This morning, I want 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..."

But that's what we should be praying for some of our friends and family members - that spiritually speaking they will **wake up** before their life on earth is over.

It's easy to discuss the end of the age and 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 our *Cousin Karen* - it's a whole different story.

At the end of the age, everyone alive at the time who doesn't know Jesus will be subject to these 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 go to the doctor... I suppose this doctor went to college, did some graduate work, even medical school... but I'll never forget what he told me....

He said, "Well, it's a good thing you came in today. A lot of people ignore the warning 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, I didn't...*

This doctor must've been speaking spiritually, for in that sense everyone will wake up after they're dead.

In the afterlife everyone will be fully aware. We'll all see clearly God's truth, and our need for Jesus, but at that point it'll be too late. The idea Paul is stressing 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." If I said it once I said it to my teenagers a thousand times, "Nothing good happens after midnight." Midnight was always their curfew. Only shenanigans happen after midnight!

And the statistics bear this out. Did you know 62% of sex crimes, and 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 to miss becomes a good excuse. You'll do all you can to stay as far from God as possible...

Paul says, "But let us who are of the day be sober..."

I'm thinking of the guy who gets drunk one night. 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 his bedroom - throws open the curtains - let's the daylight pour into 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. Join the day and live in the light of God's Word. You're life will be better if you live it sober.

And once Paul gets his bud *off of the Bud* and *out of the bed,* he gets him dressed and ready. 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." - both a breastplate for the heart and a helmet for the head.

The breastplate of *faith and love* protects the **heart**.

A police officer doesn't 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 it with *all my heart.*"

That's why we should be careful with what we want. Our heart usually follows our values. 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. We don't follow our heart. We desire and follow what we value. Your heart follows what you deem is important.

Following your heart is letting the tail wag the dog.

"Faith and love" decides the direction of our heart. What you believe in, and therefore value, shapes your desires. People who say, "I just follow my heart," really don't. Their heart follows what they believe and love.

This is why we need to wake up and sober up. We need to decide that God's Word is true! His ways should be pursued. *What do you really believe? Who do you truly love?* Then get your heart in line.

Cover your heart with *"faith and love"* - and then Paul says use *"as a helmet the hope of salvation..."* Make sure your mind continually thinks salvation thoughts.

I'll 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 all of life from His perspective... I want to see you through God's eyes. I want biblical attitudes and habits... I need to believe I can change... I need a case of salvation on the brain!

One year my son, Zach, was the catcher on his baseball team, and they'd just come out with the new hockey-goaliestyle catcher's masks. At the time they were the latest and greatest equipment. I went to the store to get one for his Christmas gift. And I remember the sticker shock - \$189 for a catcher's mask. I decided against it. That old catcher's mask would be just fine...

And I'm afraid that's the choice too many Christians make. Rather than take on new thoughts - rather than let salvation color their thinking - they just continue in the old ruts... **A new helmet is too much trouble.** I'm sure you heard the definition of insanity, "Insanity is expecting the same thing, done the same way, to 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 the hope 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 victorious Christians without a new mindset. Are we learning to think about ourselves, and others, and life from God's perspective?

We need to strap on the helmet on salvation!

And 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 these bodies of ours *"wake or sleep..."* In essence, whether we're *dead or alive* we'll be forever with Jesus!

No matter the situation we face this is our destiny - on earth or in heaven - to fellowship with Jesus.

Verse 11 is fitting conclusion, "Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing." Life can be tough. Some of you bear heavy burdens. But the tribulation you've endured is nothing compared to what 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. Your destiny is to live forever with Jesus.

You can start fulfilling that destiny today!