

## Encourage One Another

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*Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup> For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! <sup>4</sup> But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; <sup>5</sup> for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. <sup>6</sup> So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; <sup>7</sup> for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup> For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. <sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11).*

### 1. Devastated Moments

I had a life changing moment when I first came to the United States many years ago. A seminary student I knew came from Korea to Kansas City, MO to study at the Nazarene Seminary. He came to the US by himself while his family stayed in Korea. Two years later, he was excited to go home and live with his family. But a month before his graduation, the young man was diagnosed with stomach cancer.

He was upset at God. He couldn't understand how God would let him get sick. When I visited him at the hospital, he said that God would take care of him. He believed that he would be healed. Unfortunately his condition continued to get worse and he passed a short time after he returned to Korea.

I was so devastated. I remember being shocked at the young seminarian's sudden death. I asked myself, "Why did the Lord bring him to the States to have him die while studying to be a pastor?" It didn't make sense. It was not fair. How could his wife and children continue to trust such a God?

### 2. The Day of the Lord is Coming

In our passage today, we see the situation of the early Christians in Thessalonica. The early Christians were anxious about the return of Jesus. When someone died prior to Jesus' second coming, the people were devastated because they believed that these people would not join God's kingdom.

In Chapter 4 verse 14, Paul assures the people that God will bring Jesus with the people who had passed. In Chapter 5, Paul continues to talk about Christ's return. But the focus is different. Many of Thessalonians had two questions. First, when would Jesus return? Second, how would they prepare for Jesus' second coming?

In verse 1 & 2, Paul says, "**Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup>For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.**"

The concept of "the day of the Lord" is a frequent theme in the Old Testament. Amos 5:18 says, "**Why do you long for the day of the Lord?**" Many prophets said that the day of the Lord would be a catastrophic day of judgment on God's enemies. It is also considered a day of deliverance of God's people.

In the New Testament, "the day of the Lord" is a period of time which commences with the time of Jesus' return. It is considered the day of glory for God's people, but also a day of doomsday for sinners. Paul says that the day will come like a thief in the night. The thief never announces his coming.

Throughout church history, people have tried to set a timetable for the day of Jesus' return. But Paul emphasizes that the day will come unexpectedly. Because of this, believers need to be prepared for Jesus' return at all times, regardless of the actual timeline of Jesus' second coming. How can Christians prepare and what should we do while waiting for Jesus' return?

### **3. We are Children of Light**

In verse 5, Paul says, "**you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.**" Paul here divides people into two groups: people of light or the day and people of darkness or the night.

Light and darkness are used in both the Old and New Testaments as metaphors for good and evil. Paul says that the Thessalonian Christians are living not as the children of evil but as the children of light and as the children of God.

Verse 6 & 8 says, “**So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober... But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.**”

Paul uses terms like, “not fall asleep,” “keep awake,” and “be sober.” These terms imply being awakened spiritually and to have an active approach to one’s faith. Paul also uses the terms like “faith, love, and hope” to imply the signs of Christians. Paul says that Christians are those who live by faith. The lives of Christians reveal the love of Jesus and Christians are to be beacons of hope for the world.

#### **4. Encourage One Another**

In verses 9 & 10, Paul reminds the people of what Jesus did for God’s people. “**God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us.**” Paul affirms that Jesus’ death brought us salvation, reconciliation and fellowship between God and humanity. Jesus’ resurrection brought us eternal life.

In verses 10 and 11, Paul says, “**whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other.**” Does Paul’s passage here mean “whether we are alive or dead,” or “whether we are spiritually alert or not”? I believe the answer is both. Jesus promised his disciples before his ascension. “**Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age**” (Matthew 28:20). Jesus lives with us always whether we are alive or dead. If Jesus lives with us always, there is nothing to be afraid of including death.

Paul’s message here also means that we should be spiritually alert always. How can we be spiritually alert? In verse 11, Paul says, “**encourage one another and build up each other.**” The word “encourage” in Greek is *parakaleo* which means, “comfort.”

In John 14:16, Jesus says to his disciples, “**I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.**” Another Advocate is *parakletos* which Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit. The root of the word “encourage” is the same as the word “Advocate.” Thus, the passage “**Encourage one another and build up each other**” means to be like the Holy Spirit to others. What does the Holy Spirit do? In John’s gospel chapter 14, the Holy Spirit is introduced as the comforter, helper, and advocate, counselor. Romans 8:26 says, “**the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.**”

Paul reminds the early Christians and us that we are not left alone to cope with the many problems in our lives and that our mission in life is to reflect the Holy Spirit to others. Even when we do not know what to pray, the Holy Spirit prays with and for us.

## **5. Conclusion**

The Thessalonian Christians were concerned about Jesus' second coming and how to prepare for his return. Paul clearly explains that Jesus will return like a thief in the night and that the Thessalonian Christians and we should prepare for his return.

How can we prepare for Jesus' return? Paul tells his people and us that we should be like the Holy Spirit, comforting, counseling, advocating, helping, and encouraging others.

## **6. Application**

Last week, our church leadership talked about setting up a phone tree in our church. In a phone tree, each person calls another person each week to say hi and check up on them. The purpose of the phone tree is to help make sure everyone is okay and that we can be a comforter, counselor, advocate, helper, and an encourager to build up the other people in church. If you would be interested in being part of the phone tree, please let Ann Burnham know. You may tell her whom you would like to contact and take care him or her with God's love.

What about the people in our community? I am so happy that we will have the Christmas bazaar this Saturday. I am so delighted that the purpose of the bazaar is not for fundraising of our church, but to support mission. I hope you will be able to participate in any way. It will be the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The recent developments in the pandemic seem to change from bad to worse. We may not be able to contribute much to solve the situation. However, today's scripture challenges us to be the voice of the Holy Spirit. Everyone needs encouragement. Do you think I need encouragement? Last week one of Sunday children put a gift box on my office table with a thank you note. I was very much touched and encouraged.

May the Lord inspire you and me that we encourage and comfort others with God's love. Amen.