

Rev Callum Macleod: 1 Thessalonians 5:8

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] It is turned together now to 1 Thessalonians 5 and we can read at verse 8.

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober and we be done the breastplate of faith and love for a helmet the hope of salvation, for God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ and so on.

Now we might ask what is the difference between the world of AD 50 and the world of 2017? And of course there are huge differences.

We are in a different world in many ways, but at the same time when we read this letter that Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica, there aren't that many differences when we come to look at our relationship with God and our need for the direction of the Word of God.

Paul brought the Gospel to this church. We read that in Acts chapter 17 and in chapter 1 of this letter we see how powerfully successful the Gospel then was.

[1 : 21] But shortly after that the Gospel was faced with opposition. There was the introduction of false teaching. There was the kind of Godly living that wasn't biblical at all and there were so many things threatening this church in Thessalonica.

It's not really very different to the church that we have in the world in which we live. There are also two particular things in this part of the letter which was of concern to the people and which are also of concern to ourselves.

And the first of these is what happens to us after death? That is a serious and solemn question. Even those who say there is no life after death, they themselves have satisfied themselves with their own answer to that question. But we know that the Bible says something very different.

And the second question is what happens at the end of the world? How is it going to happen? What's going to happen? What's it going to be like?

[2 : 33] Two questions that they were asking and two questions that we have in our own minds and that are particular to every generation. And again, if we have decided that the world is not going to come to an end, then people have decided that they have answered that question for themselves.

But we know that the Bible says something different. And tonight we want to look at this section of this letter and to see the way in which Paul addresses the situation in Thessalonica and to apply that to ourselves as we come into the close of this here and see if we can encourage ourselves, guide ourselves, construct ourselves from the Word of God as we close this here and as we go on to the next year in the goodness of God.

I want to notice first of all in the section that we see that there is a peril. There is a real danger.

And the danger is highlighted because of the way in which the people are asking these questions. And that's how the chapter begins concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you.

They are asking about the day of the Lord, the day of the Lord that is spoken about in the Old Testament, the day that points forward to the coming of the Lord to save his people and to judge the world.

[4 : 04] And when you read down through the Old Testament, we see that the day of the Lord has both of these aspects. I read, I say at 25 and I hear the people of God saying, this is our God.

We have waited for him. He has come to save us. And the people of God in the Old Testament are looking for the day when God will come and he will save his people.

He will rescue them from their enemies and he will raise them up and give them the kingdom in all of its fullness and in all of its glory. And we see that something of that was commenced at least, the beginning of that took place when Jesus came into the world.

And tonight we, the people of God, join with the people of God in the Old Testament and we're still waiting for the day of the Lord. When the Lord Jesus will come in his glory and when we will see him and we will say, this is our God.

He has come to save us. We have waited for him. And there is the other aspect of the day of the Lord, which is what is highlighted by Paul here.

[5 : 13] And that aspect has to do with the judgment of the world. And I go and I read in Amos chapter five and the people in the days of Amos, they are deciding the day of the Lord.

And Amos says to them, hold on one minute. Do you realize what you're looking for? Do you realize what you're waiting for?

The day of the Lord is darkness and not light. The final of the Lord will come behind you and go before you. It will be a day of trembling and the inhabitants of the world will sense the presence of God and that kind of destroying, destructive presence that threatens their very being and that's going to burn because of his wrath as it comes into the world.

And when I read to my Bible, I ask about the day of the Lord and I see both of these things. And for the people of God, we long for the day of the Lord to come.

And for those who are not the people of God, we recognize tonight that there is a danger, there is a real peril. The peril has to do with that judgment aspect of the day of the Lord.

[6 : 30] And these people in the days of Paul and Thessalonica, they are asking concerning the times and the seasons. In other words, they are asking, when is it going to occur?

And they are asking, what's it going to be like? That's the basic question that we mentioned earlier. And Paul wants them to understand, first of all, that nobody knows when that's going to happen, but he wants them to understand what the day will be like.

And he uses two particular images to drive that message home. And he says to them, first of all, that that day of danger, that it will come like a thief in the night in verse 2.

And a robber is going to come and he's going to break down your door. He's going to destroy anything that comes in his path. The robber is a plunderer and you'll know he's coming.

The thief is very different. He'll come when you're asleep. He'll come when you're off your guard. He'll come when you don't expect him.

[7 : 39] When you're fast asleep, the thief will come. And Paul wants the people of God, the people of Thessalonica to recognize that, that when they're sleeping at their deepest, then the Son of God will come.

And we know at a natural level that's like. Some people sleep like a log. You ask him in the following morning, did you hear the rain last night? Did you hear the wind last night?

No. What rain? What wind? They're so slow and they sleep soundly until they're waking up in the morning. That's when the thief will come.

When you're so sound asleep that you won't hear him. You won't expect him. And tonight here, that's how you may be spiritually and your relationship with God.

You're so asleep that the storm can be there. The light can be there. The storm can be happening around you and you're so sound asleep that you don't even think about it.

[8 : 41] You don't notice it. It passes you by. He will come like a thief and if you're asleep tonight, that's how he's going to come. You won't expect him.

And you're waking up one day and the day of the Lord is here and you have no time to think about it and no time to prepare for it.

And the other image that he uses is an image which reminds us that the day of the Lord is not just part of God's program but that is connected with what God has already done.

He is telling them also that the day will be a day of destruction that will come upon them as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman and they will not escape.

You see the picture. The pregnant woman. There's conception, there's a pregnancy, we expect labour pains and we expect a birth. And Paul is saying to them, the day of the Lord is going to be like that.

[9 : 39] It's connected to what God has already done and because it's connected to that, it will certainly happen. And God sent his Son into this world.

He came into the manger. He lived his life. He went to the cross. He went to the grave. He was raised by God in the day of the resurrection. God has already done that.

And Jesus reminded the people of God in his own day that he would come again at the last day. And so there is that pregnancy season in which we are still living tonight, a pregnancy season that has commenced in the day that Jesus rose from the dead and went to the right hand of God. And because it's connected with that and because it's connected with God's programme, it will come like labour pains in God's time to...

When will it happen? What's the timing like? Can I put this date in my diary so that I can alert myself? No, you cannot. But God knows and everything is in accordance with his timetable and just like the labour pains will come on a pregnant woman when she doesn't expect, so sudden destruction will come upon you.

[11 : 02] What destruction? The awful destruction that Jesus who loved the world said to those who are around him, depart from me and never knew you into eternal fire.

That's the destruction. Destruction from God. Isn't that a danger? Isn't that tonight a peril which is unavoidable, which is inescapable, which is going to be unannounced and you're going to waken up out of your sleep one day and it's going to be there.

And all of its calamity and all of the glory of the Son of God is going to come and like no other alarm clock, the trumpet will sound and bingo, he's here and you never thought that he was going to come and you may be sleeping in your home or sleeping to you, whatever you're doing, excluding God from your life and he comes and he will find you there.

How disastrous will that be for you? If he finds you asleep separate from God without faith in Christ, then that's your danger.

And we come to the close of this year and let's not forget that that danger is there and in God's timing it will become more than a danger.

[12 : 28] It will be enacted by him and put in place by him and destruction will immediately follow the preparation, sorry, the peril.

And that leads me of course to think secondly of the preparation. That's your danger. What can you do to prepare yourself?

And Paul wants to encourage the church in Thessalonica to prepare themselves for this great day so that they won't be asleep but wide awake.

And he does that by highlighting their need to know who they are, for them to know their Christian identity, for them to be able to say that they are the children of God.

And he makes comparison in verse 4, but you are not in darkness brothers for that day to surprise you like a thief. Those who are asleep, those who are without Christ, they are in darkness.

[13 : 35] And those who sleep, sleep in the night, those who get drunk, they get drunk in the night. There's all of these pictures that Paul wants to paint, but he comes to the people of God, you are not in darkness.

Instead of that, this is your identity. First of all, you are the children, you are the sons of the light in verse 5, you are all the children of light.

And when I read about light in the New Testament especially, it brings me immediately to the passion of the Lord Jesus. He proclaims himself to be the light of the world.

The world was in darkness and he came in and he became its light. And we read through the Bible in Paul's letter to Ephesians, for example, and Paul says, you are once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

In my faith in Jesus Christ, I become the child of God, and God is my Father, and Jesus my Savior, and because of my relationship with Him, I am the child of light.

[14 : 45] My origin, my source is in the light, the person who is the light of the world. I have no identity as a Christian, no existence as a child of God, apart from my relationship with the Son of God.

And so therefore, this is the first part of my identity, I am a child of light. And tonight that's the question that God wants you to ask yourself.

What is your identity? Who do you think you are? Are you able to say tonight that you are the child of light? Are you able to look into your life and there was the darkness and then the light came and tonight I am the child of light.

I am in a living relationship with the light of the world and His light shines in me and I know that everything that I am, it's because of Him. Are you able to say tonight that that's who you are?

That's the challenge. If you want to prepare, get to the place where you can confidently say that before God and before anyone or everyone else.

[16:01] And along with that, identity you are also the one who is a child of the day. It's dark right now.

Paul is not talking about us being children of the daylight. He is not talking about us being children of AD 4950 or 2017.

He's talking about us being the children of the day of the Lord. So that tonight if I'm a child of the light and I live by faith on the Son of God and His light is in me by virtue of that first relationship, I have a relationship with the day of the Lord.

Because so much of what I am as a child of the light is connected to what will happen at the day of the Lord. He will come in all of His glory. He will come to give His victory to His church.

He will come to raise His people out of the tomb. He will come to give them immortality. He will come to give them incorruption. He will come to give them victory.

[17:07] They will be conquerors. That's the day of the Lord. And if I'm a child of the light tonight, that's my inheritance. That's where I'm going. That's where I belong to.

In a way more than I belong to where I am tonight, as Paul says, our citizenship is in heaven. That's where I belong to. That's where I've come from. It's the power of God in heaven that has made me what I am.

And as a child of the day, my whole being is exercised towards my faith in the Lord Jesus and towards my expectation that the Son of God will come.

That's why Paul says cleverly in Romans chapter 8 that the church, the people of God, the child of God, that they are groaning, waiting for the adoption in sons of God, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of the body.

What's your identity tonight? Do your faith in the Lord Jesus, are you a child of light? Do your faith in the resurrection of the dead, that the body that you have tonight is not the body that you will have, that in all of your weakness, all of your frailty, all of your failings tonight, that that's not what you will be?

[18:29] Do you firmly believe tonight that that is your identity, that that's who you really are and in the day of the glory of Christ, when you see Him face to face, that you will be made like Him because you will see Him as He is and that's tonight what you desire.

Is that your identity? A child of light, a child of the day.

The word of God wants you tonight in the face of peril to seriously ask yourself that question and of your response to that question tonight is positive and you can see that you are.

Paul and the word of God wants to go further. He wants you to prove your identity and that's the challenging thing. Tonight I can see anything about myself but if I'm not able to prove that then it's meaningless.

So Paul is saying to him, okay, this is your identity, no, I want you to prove this and how are they going to do that? He says to them in verse 6, so then let us not sleep as others do but let us keep awake and be sober.

[19:44] I cannot be a child of light and of the day and be asleep. I'm going to do these two connected things and I want us to think of these two connected things tonight in the simple way.

Watchfulness and if I can use this term wordfulness or word of Godfulness, these are the two things that through which I'm going to prove my identity.

First of all then watchfulness, I'm going to be awake, I'm going to be alert. Alert right now to what God is saying. Alert to the message of the Gospel.

Alert at every moment I come in contact with the word of God to what God is saying. Reading it, praying over it, praying over the sermons that I hear, going home to think about the word of God.

I'm alert, I'm on my guard and watching. I'm taking care because there is danger out there, there is peril in the way and I want to watch.

[20:50] Not sleep, be awake. John Stort speaks about Christians who go about in their pajamas yawning all day.

Some days they might be in church. Christians who are just not committed to the Lord Jesus and it's fashionable nowadays to wear my onesie and to extend my sleeping night into my days so that I carry the whole idea of my sleep and my rest into my day and I go around all day in my onesie.

And Paul and the word of God is saying as John Stort was saying don't wear your spiritual onesie. Don't sleep as a Christian.

Don't yawn your way through life. Be alert, be awake, be alive all of the time to what the word of God is saying to you. And you have to ask yourself tonight what is your, how do you show your Christian identity?

Do you wear your spiritual pajamas? Do you spend half of your Christian life yawning and asleep? [22 : 02] In other words, not alert. In other words, not watchful. You have to prove your identity by being alert to the word of God, by being alert to what God is saying.

That's the challenge. Prove it. The child of light, okay, prove it. And he wants them also to be sober, minded, to think clearly.

And if I send somebody on watch, there is a seaman, I need to tell that watchman what he's going to look out for. If I'm going to send somebody on watch in the midst of conflict, I need to train that person to know what to look for, to recognise the danger signals, to be able to take appropriate personal action, and to be able to take the action that can be conveyed to others so that they also will be safe.

And so I need a watchman to know the script, to know the manual, to know the instructions, to know what he's looking for. And that's what it means to be sober-minded, to have my mind trained by the word of God.

So that when there's a decision to be made, what does the word of God say? When there's danger in the way, how does God want me to address this and to deal with this? It brings me back to my understanding of the word of God and to do so in such a way that I will recognise that every step of the way in the midst of the danger, God says, thus says the Lord, living my life, proving my identity, the behaviour that shows who I am.

[23 : 54] And if it's challenging to know my identity, it is a far greater challenge to prove it.

Would God want you tonight to be able to prove that you're the child of God if you want to be safe? Does your life, does your behaviour, does it prove who you are?

Or do you yawn through a Christian life and profession without any awareness of what God is saying to you?

And if he asks them to prove their identity, he also wants them to protect it. How alarming is that? How humbling is that? That my profession needs to be protected. And here there's that image of going into conflict and the need to be done, the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.

[25 : 07] He wants me to protect my mind with that helmet that covers my head and around the side of my face. He wants me to protect my mind from every false teaching, from every false teaching that there is in the church of God in the world and in the world around me.

The way we're bombarded with so much information, so much information to sidetrack us from our courteous people of God.

We are to protect our identity by having our helmets on so that as we train our minds from the word of God, the arrows of the false teaching around us will not affect the way that we're thinking.

And also he wants us to be done the breastplate of faith and love. My heart, where I do all my loving and where I do all my choosing and where all my emotions are and from which all of the things that I'm attracted to, to which they're connected, this place in here where God wants to be in control, where Jesus wants to live and to fill my heart every corner of it.

This heart, God wants me to be done the breastplate of faith in His name, of faithfulness as well and love for the Lord Jesus. My devotion to God, my commitment to Him, living out my Christian identity that springs from my relationship with Jesus and from my understanding of the word of God and that gives me to live a life that shows my child of God.

[27 : 07] When I see a policeman, I don't need to ask what they're doing. When I see a person, I don't need to ask what he or she is doing. When I see a nurse, I don't need to ask what they're doing.

And Paul and the word of God wants us to think about that tonight. Who we are in our hearts. What we are doing and proving that in our engagement with God and how we're protecting our identity out there in the world.

What do people say when they see me? What do people say when they see you? Who are they? Why are they doing that?

Why are they not doing this? Why are they living in their lives like that? That's the way, we're in the spotlight in the world and judgments will be made.

And tonight in the peril of the coming day of the Lord, I need to be so prepared that all of my life and all of my living declare who I am that I'm prepared.

[28 : 21] It's a child of the light and it's a child of the day that I may confidently wait for the day of the Lord for the appearance of the Son of God.

The preparation. And if there is a peril and there is a preparation, there are also promises. And that's what God is like. It's hard work on your own, but God doesn't leave you on your own. And more than that, it is God's plan that you will be exactly where Jesus is. And that's how Paul encourages these people as he closes this section and he brings that their assurance back not to who they think they are and not to the life that they are living, but what lies behind that and what does lie behind that, the plan and the purpose of God.

What happened in my life in this past year? I see the stopping points. Amazing, awesome, shattering.

[29 : 39] They were all there. And the word of God wants me to know that these stopping places were on God's program, that in God's plan.

And when I come to think of my identity as the child of God and your identity as the child of God, then God wants you to go right back to your own heart, but to his heart.

And that's where he begins in verse nine. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ who died for us.

God has destined us not to wrath, but to obtain salvation. Destined. He uses a better word in Romans.

He speaks about being predestined. It takes us right back to before the world was, to the heart of God himself and the choices that he was making.

[30 : 45] And in the choices that he made, he made a plan. And when he made that plan, Jesus was at the centre of it. And when he put Jesus at the centre of it, he put his people right around and into the Lord Jesus.

And I go back to before the world was and I find in the heart of God, at the throne of God, this glorious plan with this awesome Redeemer who is going to save his people and they're going to be in him in a way that I can't understand, but in a way which will make them secure.

So that when he dies, he dies for their sins. When he rises, they rise with him. He has predestined us to the adoption of children in Christ.

And that's the glorious place to which I trace my identity tonight, to which I trace my assurance of God's love tonight, my security in the face of the peril that I go right back to God.

Can you do that? If you're the child of God, you have to. Because it takes the security and the assurance of your salvation out of your hands and brings it into the hands of God.

[32 : 06] And then there's no need for insecurity because the hands that made the world, the hands that made us are the hands in which we find our salvation.

My Father is greater than I is, Jesus. No one can take them out of my hands and not for wrath, but to obtain salvation.

That's interesting because we usually receive salvation. It's the gift of God and that's supremely what it is. But when I think of obtaining something, I think of arriving somewhere after some effort. I obtain something by reaching a goal and it does speak into my activity. It speaks into my activity as the child of God, proving my identity, protecting my identity.

And at the end of the course, because of God's plan, I obtain the salvation, not the one that I have tonight. The salvation that comes at the day of the Lord, the promise of God.

[33 : 25] And I raced everything in that tonight that Jesus died for our sins and that he rose from the dead and that he is the first fruits, the first from the dead.

And because he lives, we shall live also. I feel secure in that tonight because it's not all about me. In many ways it's not about me at all. It's about him and his salvation and what he achieved. And to my assurance, and Paul Cleverly takes everything back to the original discussion.

What was it? It was with regard to those who were asleep, who slept in Jesus. It was with regard to Christian people who had died.

And the relationship between them and those who were going to be alive when Jesus came. That's what we see at the end of the previous chapter.

[34 : 35] For this we declare in verse 15, for this we declare to you by a word from the Lord that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

Because those who are asleep in Jesus, God will bring with him. And he closes the argument by saying, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we might live with him.

In other words, whether we are alive or dead when the Son of God comes. There's nothing to do with the sleep that those who are in darkness are sleeping.

There's nothing to do with the way in which God gives his beloved children sleep. Our sleep in Jesus.

How beautiful is that? How caring and how loving that is. That the people of God have slept in Jesus. But the most precious thing of all is to be with Christ.

[35 : 40] And that was Paul's obsession in Philippians chapter 1, for me to live with Christ and to die is gain. To depart and to be with Christ which is better by far.

And in the end of the day, whether we are awake or asleep, we might live with him. That's the glory. That's the day of the Lord. That's the people of God who are waiting for the salvation to come. Who are waiting to say, this is our God. We have waited for him.

He has come to save us. So we shall ever be with the Lord. I look forward to that security along with the people of God.

And God wants his children tonight to feel secure. Not to be afraid. And to be sure that because of his purposes and plans, as they are outworked in their lives through the oppression of Jesus, that because of that, the children of God will be around God's throne.

[36 : 53] Behold me, worried in Hebrews chapter 2, with regard to Jesus. Behold me and the children whom God has given to me.

It would be wonderful tonight as we close this year that we would all have this security midst of everything our life has thrown at us and will throw at us as long as we're in this world.

And if the year that is closing has stunned us and shocked us and surprised us in different ways, we can be sure that there will be similar things in the sense of surprising and stunning and shocking in the coming year.

But let's make sure tonight that we recognize the danger. Let's make sure tonight that we know that we are the children of God through faith in Jesus.

And let's make sure that we grasp the promises and enjoy our assurance and enjoy our security and wait for the appearing of the Son of God.

[38 : 01] And to see Him face to face and to be forevermore with Him and with the people of God who are here tonight and who are not here and who have gone before.

And we can but think of them as they are around God's throne, that the day will come when together we will be with Him. Hallelujah. Listen, God great, in Him we put our trust.

May He bless His word to us. There's bow heads in prayer. Lord, our gracious God, we rejoice in you as our Saviour. We bless your great name for every way in which you are working in the hearts and lives of people like yourselves.

And we give thanks to you that you do not do that in a hidden way, but that your salvation is like light. It's like light in the hearts of your people.

It's like light that shines out through them and from them. It's like light that speaks of the glory and beauty of the Lord Jesus. And it's the light that reminds us that we belong to a better world and a better place where the people of God will be gathered with their Saviour in the glory of Emmanuel's land.

[39 : 12] You pray that your blessed word to us tonight help us to recognise our danger without faith in Jesus. Help us to prepare ourselves. Help us to be ready and help us to rejoice in your great promises.

That we may have peace with you and peace in our hearts as we close this year and as we approach the coming one in your good providence and your good will as we see it.

So accept our thanks and be gracious for Jesus' sake. Amen.