

Hope Fuels Holiness

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[0 : 00] Thanks be to God. And why don't we pray for his help as we open up his word together this evening. God, our Father, we pray that you would speak to us.

Heavenly Father, we pray this through your word, you would confront us in our sins, comfort us in our sorrows, and through your word that you would continue to conform us into the image of your son, Jesus Christ.

By your spirit, speak to us, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.

And please do keep open that passage in front of you. That's where we're gonna be anchoring ourselves together this evening. Your destination determines your direction.

If you're a note taker, that's what I want you to write down, at least for tonight, is that your destination determines your direction.

[1 : 08] Or you might think your ambition, that's gonna impact what you aim for, isn't it? Now, let me explain it this way.

When you're learning to drive, there's a lot that's going on, isn't there? There's probably about 50, 60 things that you've got to consider when you first get in.

Are your hands in the right place? Have you put on your seatbelts? Is your chair close enough, but not too close? Are you up high enough so you can see out through the window? Have you made sure all the different mirrors are in the right places?

Have you got your hand on the gear stick? Are you able to move that? Is everything in place? Have you got your feet in the right place? What's going on? How are you gonna move them at different times? And there is a lot of things happening.

And it can feel overwhelming, and you're probably gonna stall about four or five times, and you're gonna hope that none of your friends are walking nearby while it's happening. But the most helpful bit of advice that I got was from my driving instructor, Alan.

[2 : 09] He said to me, look, there's all these things that are gonna happen. There's all these things you gotta think about, but most importantly while you're driving, it's where you're looking to. He said to me, make sure you're looking forward, right onto the horizon.

Because that's how you're gonna know when you're gonna need to turn, when you're gonna need to move. It's where you're looking at, that's what's gonna determine if you're gonna drive in the right way or you're gonna crash.

And this evening, this passage, this kind of joins together two big themes that you've been looking at over the last few weeks.

A few weeks ago, you saw what is God's will for your life is your sanctification or your holiness. Last week, you considered together the hope of the gospel, what it means for those who have died.

And here, what I think what we see is these two, holiness and hope, are wed together in this passage. Because the hope that we aim towards is gonna determine our holiness right now.

[3 : 25] So next week, when you get to the next part of Thessalonians, what you get here is gonna determine how well you're gonna understand the next bit. Okay, so hopefully, this is gonna give you the grounds, the foundation as you get to that.

So nice, I've got two points for you. I think they'll be up on the screen up there. But our first point is this, what we see in this passage is, the day, our destination, the day is coming.

The day is coming. So here we see this, now brothers and sisters, about the times and dates, we do not need to write to you.

For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. The day of the Lord in the Old Testament, particularly in the Old Testament prophets, was this, it is the event on the horizon of the people of God.

the day of the Lord is that time when God is going to bring justice and renewal. A time of justice when He will purge all the evil, all the sin, all the hypocrisy from the world.

[4 : 44] But it's also gonna be a time when He's gonna bring about a great renewal. When all things are made as they were meant to be, as they were intended to be, good, very good, beautiful, where He will establish peace.

And what Paul says here is, they know very well about the times and the dates of what is coming. But there's a bit of irony here that what he says there, when he says, you know very well, that word very well is literally, it's accurately or precisely.

And what Paul is telling them is, you know very well about not knowing. You know precisely about not knowing the exact dates.

And Paul here uses kind of three images to convey this, to help them to understand that they know the day is coming, but it's not something they know when. And that's important.

He uses three images to convey this. First, you see there the image of the thief, the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. David Jackman, who's written this really little helpful book on Thessalonians called The Authentic Church, he talks about this time.

[6 : 00] It's a famous story in the lore of the Jackman household of one night when his wife nudged him, maybe about two, three o'clock in the morning. It's a Saturday night going into Sunday and she nudged him.

She says, I think there's somebody in the house. And he says, no, I really don't think there is. We moved over to the side and after a few seconds she nudged him again. No, there's really someone in the house.

And in his head he's thinking, it's Sunday morning. Who is going to come into our house on a Sunday morning? No one's going to come then, are they? That's the picture because when he went out, walked down the stairs, he saw a thief who had broken into their house.

That's the kind of picture that we see here. Any good thief isn't going to write a note and tell you, I'm going to be there at half two on Saturday nights just so you're aware, just so you don't get too scared.

Just don't come outside the door and I'll leave everything for you. A thief won't tell you. That's the kind of picture there. It's the same picture that Jesus used, wasn't it, as we heard earlier on. But then he uses this picture of a military attack.

[7 : 07] He says there, while people are saying peace and safety destruction will come on them suddenly. And peace and security here, peace and safety.

This is maybe actually just a little bit of a dig here by Paul at the Roman Empire. So here he's rising to the church in Thessalonica, one of the Greek states.

And he's rising to this church here under the overarching rule of the Roman Empire. And at this time there was something called the Pax Romana, which meant this place where if you were a citizen you could roam freely.

There was an unprecedented peace in the lands. And this was the line here, peace and safety. This is what we all have.

And what Paul is saying here is we might think that we are safe and secure in our man-built empires, but it will come suddenly, destruction.

[8 : 15] Back in 1913, The Economist magazine, at the end of the year, coming up to the new year, going over into 2014, they released some of their predictions for the next decade.

And one of their predictions was that there would be decades of peace. Later, that next year, started what was at the time the bloodiest war that had ever happened.

He says here, that's the kind of idea, this people who get caught up in this peace and security mindset built by human empires, suddenly it will come at us like a shock.

And then the final picture there is of the labor pains on a pregnant woman. Here is actually a bit of an echo from an Old Testament prophet from Isaiah 13.

Isaiah 13, which speaks of the coming day of the Lord and speaks of it in these terms. Speaks of it in these terms of labor pains coming unexpectedly, when God will come in glory to judge and to renew.

[9 : 35] One of the things that I've learned as a Christian is this. I don't know my future, but I know the future.

I think we can all get caught up in trying to understand what is God's will for my life. Joe did a good job helping you to think through what that meant a few weeks ago.

We can get caught up thinking what's happening to us. God never promises to tell us exactly what's going to happen to us next week, next month, next year, but he does tell us what is the future for us all.

It is going to come. You might think of it in these terms. Something I've noticed, something I find slightly strange, is I've noticed Christian couples will decide together that they are going to get married, but there hasn't actually been a proposal yet.

So they know it's coming, but it hasn't yet happened. And that's the kind of picture that's going on here. We know this is coming, we just don't know when.

[10 : 52] That's not the important thing. Paul is saying we don't need to know when it's coming, but we do need to know that it's coming. You see, some people get caught up in this.

I don't know if anyone knows what links these dates. September the 6th, September the 29th, October the 2nd of 1994, and also the 21st of May, 2011.

I wonder if anyone knows what joins all of those. It's a man named Harold Camping, an American who predicted that on each of those dates, God would return.

He thought that looking through the scriptures, he had identified when God would come back. Ignoring completely this over and over again, Jesus, Paul tells us that we will not know the dates and the times.

And so what Paul is kind of pushing through and leading to here then is he's wanting to ask the question here, what day, what day is shaping your life?

[12 : 11] What day is determining and dictating your decisions? Depending on our stage of life, that can be quite different, can't it?

Is it maybe your graduation that's coming up and you're thinking, that's the day. First of all, I've got to get all my exams, got to get all my assignments done, but I've also got to think about getting all my applications in place and this is the day that's shaping everything.

Or it might be the wedding day that you're looking forward to, or the wedding day you might hope would happen someday. Maybe it's the day when your children finally leave the house.

Maybe it's retirement day when you finally don't have to go into work. This is the day that's on the horizon. And what Paul is wanting to do is he's wanting to say here, you know what day is coming.

You don't know when, but you know exactly that it is coming and this is the day that must shape your life right now.

[13 : 28] The day is coming and so Paul invites us and calls us then to live in light of the day. To live in light of the day.

That's our second point this evening as we look through the rest of this passage together. We are called to live in light of the day. What does it then look like for us to live now?

What does it look like? Verse 4, but you brothers and sisters are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day.

What we're going to see here as we work through this is what Paul is saying is that day, that day that is coming, that day that is certain, that day of the Lord of justice and renewal, that day when Jesus returns in glory to draw his people home, that day when Jesus comes to build a new heavens and a new earth where the righteousness dwells, that day, that day doesn't just determine your destination, that day tells us who you are.

And what Paul is wanting to say then is this, that day living in the light of that day, we are called to live according to our new status, our new citizenship, our new identity in Christ.

[15 : 09] The day shapes who we are. And Paul expands here on this day imagery, contrasting it with the night.

What he's saying here is the day is coming, the day is dawning. You see, this day of the Lord is not just exclusively a future event.

Actually, the day of the Lord has started, has ignited. When Jesus came in, when he broke in, when he was born to Mary, when he died on the cross, when he rose from the dead, the new day started.

It dawned. The light shone over and the night started to end. And what Paul is saying here is that we are children of the day and of the light.

So we might think of it in these terms. I don't know about you, but whenever I go down to London, one of the things I love doing is walking around the areas of all the embassies.

[16 : 28] I don't know why, maybe it's the kind of challenge of looking at the different flags and trying to work out which one is which, and just thinking of all the different worlds, all the different nations and cultures, which are represented by each of these places.

That if you were to walk in, different languages are being spoken. And actually, when you walk into an embassy, you are then walking into and living in a place where they live under different laws, where they live under different customs.

What I want us to think about in this way is that we as Christians, that the local church is an embassy of the future.

So let's think of it this way. The day of the Lord, this is the big event on the horizon for the people of God. And if you are a believer in Jesus, that is the day that determines your life.

And you, that day has broken in your life, and we now together are this embassy of the future. So what Joe was saying is rightly, we are citizens of this country, living here, but our primary citizenship, our primary citizenship, belongs to the day that's to come, the new creation that that symbolizes.

[18 : 05] And so, while we live under the laws of this land, we also live according to the day that is to come. let's think through that, what that means.

Verses 6 to 7 are going to help us then here. So then, let us not be like others who are asleep, those people who are still ruled and dictated and governed by the night, but let us be awake awake and sober.

So we're not to be like the old world, the one which is bathed in darkness. You see, those who are in the darkness, you see there, what does it say?

They're those who sleep and get drunk. I think it's helpful here when we see this kind of getting drunk and sleep language, it's important to see how that's contrasted there.

Those who get drunk, the opposite here, the picture of what we are called to is to be sober. Now here, what Paul is saying here when he says be sober here, it's not particularly speaking here of alcohol, but it's using that picture.

[19 : 28] You see, what does alcohol do? It starts to inhibit the way that you think, but also causes you to lose your inhibitions. It gets in the way of making sounds, choices.

But sober means being aware. It means not numbing ourselves to reality. Then the other side here is he talks about not being asleep, but being awake.

awake. To be awake means that you're alert, you're watching, you're waiting. On the 31st of July 2019, Fort William Football Club ended a 73-game losing streak.

streak. That losing streak lasted 840 days. Now that must have been tough. But do you know who probably was toughest on?

Can you imagine the person who gave up going to the matches the week before that? And can you imagine who it was best for? The person who was there on that day when they finally won?

[20 : 54] Can you imagine the joy, the scenes of excitement that they'd finally seen the victory, that it had finally come? That's the picture here is waiting, being sober, being awake, living in light of the day which is definitely coming.

Because you see, we know that because Jesus has risen physically from the dead, that proves that he will return and we are called to wait for him.

And Paul then gives us here, he gives us two motivations to stay sober. And you see there verse 8, but since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate.

hope. So you see there first this motivation, we belong to the day. This is the point we've been kind of trying to hammer home here, isn't it? And the language there is, so since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on, therefore we should put on faith, love, and hope.

hope. It's always a big question, it's probably not as big as it used to be, but what should we wear to church? What is fitting as we gather together to worship?

[22 : 30] For those who have been in the church for decades, I'm sure you could tell us of the way things have changed. I think one thing I've noticed as I've read through the scriptures, particularly in the New Testament, is I don't think I can find anything that explicitly says what we should wear to church.

But numerous times we are told that what we should wear together as a church, how are we to clothe ourselves as the people of God?

Here it uses the picture, back to that battle picture, putting on faith and love as a breast place and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

The picture here is of putting on these because we know that living in the light in a time of darkness is a struggle. It's a battle. It's tough and it's hard.

But look at the words that are used. These are the key words that are said to mark the people in the church in Thessalonica. The chief virtues of the Christian faith, which is faith, love, and hope.

[23 : 55] This is what people who belong to the day, who are children of the light, this is how we are called to dress. Faith, love, and hope.

And so the motivations we see here is because we belong to the day, but then verse 9, we are destined for something that is far greater.

Have a look at verses 9 and 10, and these are just beautiful. It would be worth spending a whole sermon just thinking about these. But you see this, for God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

He died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. And so ultimately, we might say it in these terms, the ultimate motivation for any of us to walk in the light, to live a life of holiness, is the gospel itself.

What does it say there? God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. See, here's the good news, and it's worth repeating, and maybe you're here visiting tonight, here we come right to the very crux of what we believe, is this, that God will come to judge the world, and that the issue in the world is the sin in our hearts.

[25 : 42] But here's the good news, is that at the cross, Jesus bore the wrath in our place. That if you believe in him, when Jesus returns, he will welcome us in as his family.

But it's not just about his death, but his resurrection. He died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

Our hope is that we will be raised with him into eternal life. It is salvation, not wrath.

Because Jesus took the latter so we could receive the former. And where Paul finishes here is where he finished where you were last week.

Do you notice the similarity as what he said in verse 18 in chapter 14? In chapter 4 he says the same here. Therefore, encourage one another.

[26 : 51] But he adds here, and build each other up. And so what I want to say is this. The challenge of living in the light as children of the day, how we work through this happens primarily not from the pulpits, but the pew.

You see what he says there? Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up. The strongest church is where the word is preached clearly and the word dwells richly among its people.

And it is spoken in truth, in love to one another. You see, the church is built up as the church encourages, as we see our brothers and sisters struggling to live in the light while living surrounded by darkness.

And so the call is to encourage one another with these truths. to say to the person who is next to you and who is struggling, guess what?

Because of Jesus, you are a child of the day and of the light. The night, the darkness, no longer defines who you are.

[28 : 34] Remember, dear brother, remember, dear sister, your hope, your destination is secure.

Let's hold on to that together. Let's pray. God our Father, what a wonderful thing to know this.

Our future, our destiny, our hope is secure, it is certain, it is assured.

It is assured. we know the darkness that is not just in this world, but the darkness that still inhabits the corners of our own hearts.

And so we pray, Heavenly Father, progressively but truly, that you would shine the lights into our lives. Your word is a lamp to our feet, and we pray for your words to guide us along the path of life and righteousness righteousness.

[30 : 14] As we walk this pilgrim path, as we walk towards you, bless us, keep us.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.