

Sermon, November 19, 2017 - Pentecost 24

## Not of Darkness!

1 Thessalonians 5:1–11



Dear Friends in Christ

Once again we meditate on the last day's theme, the end of the world and what to expect.

It is not an easy theme, is it! Some don't like to hear about it, others we love to ponder but not sure how is going to be because there are several theories out there, from pre to post millennium, for example. And not only Christians but even the sceptic and atheistic world is talking and warning about the end of the world.

On November 6<sup>th</sup> one of the headlines of a News Papers was this one: "Stephen

Hawking warns how the end of the World will be." This guy however has changed is predictions somewhat. His time frame is a 1,000 years, but could be as early as 100 years where people will be destroyed by artificial intelligence, and now he says that in about 600 years the earth could be engulfed in a ball of fire. That's what he said on November 5<sup>th</sup> at the 2017 Tencent We scientific Summit in Beijing.

Now here is the thing, some newspapers actually said in their report that Hawking's prediction matches with the Biblical predictions.

Paul in the first chapter of his second letter to the Thessalonians actually says that Jesus will appear with "his mighty angels<sup>8</sup> in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." (2 Thess. 1:7-8)

Then the apostle Peter says: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. <sup>11</sup> Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, <sup>12</sup> waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God..." (2 Peter 3:10-12)

Now this is interesting, isn't it? On the one hand we have Hawking that is an atheist saying something that matches the Scriptures, what an odd coincidence, write? Well maybe not, maybe it is God's way to keep warning us. Yes but it is scary on the one hand, and on the other, well who would believe an atheist right? But on the same note, who would believe the Bible right? Well for some, atheist and Christians alike, we don't want to be scared with that fact.

However for us Christians, Paul calls us to a degree of faith that is hopeful and active. In our epistle reading for today Paul tells us: "Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you.<sup>2</sup> For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."

Full aware! There you have it! But are you, are we full aware? Do we know, do we understand and stand on the truth that the Lord Jesus will come again? And that his coming will be like a thief in the night? If not we invite you to learn and trust Jesus promises that he will come again, as a thief in the night. However the most pressing question we need to ask ourselves is if we are ready. How will Jesus find us? What are we to do in the meantime? That's what the text from 1 Thessalonians calls us to, pay attention to, to be ready.

And how are we to do that? For starters Paul says: "But you are not in darkness, brothers... For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness." For those who believe and abide in Jesus, darkness is gone; the darkness of sin and death is gone.

### **I. Light and darkness are common in Scripture to express certainty or uncertainty.**

So if you are in Christ, you are not a child of darkness but of the light.

All through the Scriptures God uses the difference between as he is doing through Paul today. But why, what's the point? Very simply, it means that those of the light are those with faith and those of the darkness are unbelievers.

You know what it means to be in the dark, don't you? In the dark, not only you can't see where you are going; a person can't see danger, danger either in his path or coming toward him. He simply doesn't know much about what's out in front or surrounding him. But when it is daytime, ah! Now we are talking! All can be seen. There's no question about the path on which you walk in day time. In the light, one can have great confidence about himself, about where he's going, and where he'll end up.

So, it is with faith, in it all confidence has been given. One knows who he is, knows where he goes, and knows where he'll end up. Faith in Christ, the faith God so graciously gives in Baptism, allows one to know, without any doubting, that he belongs to God. Faith in Christ allows one to know that the path he walks in life is a God-given path, walking in the manner of Jesus—serving others, honoring God in all one does. Faith in Christ allows one to know, with absolute certainty that he will be with Jesus in the glory of glories when this life is over. This is most certainly being in the light!

But in the darkness, it's the absolute opposite. St. Paul warns, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape" (vv 2b–3). The only certainty in darkness is uncertainty. One may deceive himself that there is some certainty, but if one in darkness can actually be honest, he must—he must!—admit there's none. Oh, yes, one could say that there will certainly be death. But even that doesn't answer the question about what happens after one dies.

### **II. Paul addresses Christ's coming at the end because of the sins we commit in this arena.**

Indeed, this is the reason for Paul writing the words of our passage for this morning, to give greater certainty to the believers of Thessalonica. He writes, "Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (vv 1–2). When Paul begins this segment with the words, "times and seasons," he's adding information to the previous segment in which he describes the

future glory for those who believe in the Christ: “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (4:16–17). This, we and the Thessalonians know.

We should know. Yes we have asked the question before, but have studied the Scriptures and now know. Yet Paul still wants to address this question, he does so for two primary reasons: One is that our sinful nature just doesn’t want to trust without having some concrete evidence. No, we just want the Lord to give us some specifics so that we can plan accordingly, on the one hand, or so that we would not be confused and deceive by false teachings, like Hawking for example. The problem is that we have the specifics, as in date and time. Our faith then will either diminish or die. Really if we know, there is no need for God’s word and faith, is there? Not really. That’s why people pay much attention to what secular views are saying because they want to know the specifics but don’t care about faith.

The second reason for Paul addressing this question about the day and time of the return of Christ is that if we knew, then we’d think we could live however we want until then and clean up our act just before Jesus’ arrival, should that actually be possible. But Paul knows what we are all about, that’s why he urges us: “Let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night” (vv 6–7).

Now, some of us might say, well even if we knew the specifics about Christ return, we will not deny our faith or misbehave. We may even say: “I will not quit trusting in what God has done for me, and I will not, by any means, stop living my life to the honor of God in everything I do.” If that’s what you think and commit to do, excellent. But you know, deep down, that our real tendency is to think and do that which pleases our flesh and not God, we avoid caring for others, even try to get out of it. O, we let the flesh, our anger, our ideas and thoughts to be first rather than please and glorify God. That’s our daily battle, isn’t it! In fact, that’s one of the prime reasons why Jesus gave his life—to forgive all our sin, of course, but specifically, especially, the sins to stop trusting and to live in a less-than-honorable manner.

### **III. It turns out it’s a great gift not to know when the end is coming.**

So, we really have to say that it’s a great gift not to know, not to know the day or the time or the season when Jesus will come again. You see, what we do know is quite enough: “Concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. . . . You are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness” (vv 1, 4–5).

By not knowing, we then focus on what really counts. The two things that really count are, first, that we believe—and believe with all our hearts—that God has made us children of the light. He did so by buying us back from the clutches of Satan and our sin: “For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him” (vv 9–10). And God made us children of this wonderful future by giving us faith

through the Word in our Baptism and in our ears. We really are his very own children and we will be such for now and for all eternity.

The other thing that really counts is that without having to keep looking toward some day or date or season in the future, we can just let Christ live in and through us. Indeed, by letting that be the truth of our lives, those around us will see us as significantly different from those who live without the light: "Since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. . . . Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing" (vv 8, 11).

Being children of the light changes altogether what life is and what life is all about. One no longer lives for self, but for the Christ who saved us and for the people with whom we are to share God's love. That is the sum and substance of being no longer of the darkness, but being children of the light, being children of the heavenly Father.

In that most precious status in his Son Jesus, he has removed all the sins we have and ever will commit to free us to live in His light. Now let's do so, let's leave the works of darkness aside, let's seek God's forgiveness and live, and act and rejoice in the light. For that's what we ought to do. Jesus he lives in and through us so that we become and are lights to the world around us. If it were not for believers in the world, it would indeed be the dark ages all over again. Praise God for having come to us to make us his children of light. Praise God for living in and through us, making us alert and sober about this life and knowledgeable about what is to come in the next life. Yes, we have so much for which to praise God. Thus, we say again, all praise be to God.

Amen.