

FINDING HOPE / Sunday School- July 4, 2010

Unifying Topic: GOD'S COSMIC PLAN

Lesson Text

I. Hope In God's Timetable (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3)

II. Hope In Being Children Of Light (1 Thessalonians 5:4-8)

III. Hope In Our Salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:9-11)

The Main Thought: For God hadth not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thess. 5:9, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Most people want to understand how they fit in and contribute to society as a whole. What is the context within which we obtain such an understanding? God's plan of salvation is embodied in the divine plan for all creation, which is directly related to Christ's return to earth.

Lesson Aim: To help students understand God's plan as well as the fate of both the unrighteous and righteous.

Life aim: To reassure believers that God has a plan involving judgment of the unrighteous and protection of the righteous.

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- 5:1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.
5:2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.
5:3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.
5:4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.
5:5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.
5:6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.
5:7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.
5:8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.
5:9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,
5:10Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.
5:11Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

HISTORY:

¹Remember that after seeing people saved and the church started in Thessalonica over the course of just about three weeks, Paul had been run out of town. He hadn't seen or heard how the Christians were doing. So he sent Timothy to them to find out what had become of the church and their faith. Timothy found them in a good place: working in faith, laboring in love, and being steadfast in their hope. When Paul got the news, he, Timothy, and Silas wrote this letter of 1Thessalonians. This letter to the Thessalonians has reminded them of their past, encouraged and exhorted them in their present Christian walk, and has corrected a belief of theirs regarding the future rapture and those who died before it happened.

The passage of **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** begins a new subject that intrigues people and offers the most glorious hope to man and his world. The subject is the return of Jesus Christ to earth and the resurrection of the dead (The Rapture). Paul does not want his readers to lose hope about their future with the Lord, simply because other believers have died ("fallen asleep"). Perhaps some Thessalonians thought that Christians would not die before Jesus returned. Paul reassures them that those who have died in Christ will be raised and will meet the Lord along with those who are still living when He comes. It will not only bring blessings to believers, but it will launch the most terrifying judgment upon unbelievers.

1. *The concern:* Will believers be resurrected when Christ returns? (v13).
2. *The fact:* departed believers will return with Christ. (v14-15).
3. The events of the Lord's rapture. (v16-18).
4. The time of the Lord's return and the Day of the Lord. (Chp.5:1-3).

4:13 The concern of the believers at Thessalonica involved believers that have fallen asleep. Would their loved ones who had died share in the resurrection when Christ returned to earth? Remember, the church at Thessalonica had just been founded; it was brand new. It was also being bitterly persecuted and was under salvage attack. Some of the believers were dying; perhaps some were even being martyred and Christ had not yet returned. They were eagerly looking for the blessed hope; the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ. They knew the gospel just as we know it. All kinds of concerns arose in their minds just as they do in the minds of believers in every generation. The Thessalonians were

¹ <http://www.rondaniel.com/library/52-1Thessalonians/1Thessalonians0501.html>

concerned and they were asking questions about the resurrection and the Lord's return out of concern, not out of curiosity.

- First, do not be ignorant about those that are asleep or have died. Sleep is a natural description of death because the body ceases its activity, and because there is an awakening in the Resurrection. It is as easy for Christ to awaken the dead as for us to awaken a sleeping person. Study and grasp what God teaches and be comforted and challenged in the glorious hope He gives.
- Second, do not grieve excessively over loved ones who die before Christ returns especially those that die in the Lord. We are bound to experience some sorrow and grief, but we are not to suffer grief like unbelievers who have no hope. Their spirits remain alive. When we say good-bye to loved ones who are passing on, it is not good-bye forever, but for a little while. The unbeliever does not have this hope. He can only look forward to an accursed eternity.

There is a glorious hope for believers, for they shall rise to meet God and our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

4:14-15 There are three proofs of this great fact:

1. **Proof 1:** the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ proves that the departed will return to earth with Him.² This is the foundation of our Christian faith. It was the backbone of all apostolic preaching starting with Pentecost. The Resurrection proves that Jesus really is God's Son. If He did not rise, our faith is meaningless. His Resurrection is not just a comforting story but a historical fact and truth supported by the testimony of many credible eyewitnesses. Therefore, if we believe in Jesus Christ...
 - a. We never have to die because He has already died for us.
 - b. We shall arise from the dead even as He arose.

How?- By believing that Christ did die and rose from the dead for us. If we believe in Jesus Christ, then when we depart this world, we go to be with Him; and when He returns, we shall return with Him.

2. **Proof 2:** departed believers are with Christ; they are living with Him face to face.³ We do not have to wonder where they are. The word "*sleep*" is not teaching that death is a semi-conscious state, an existence somewhat like a deep sleep. The believer immediately goes to be with Christ when he departs from this world and he will rest with Christ throughout eternity. It is God in the Person of Jesus Christ who will return to earth and bring departed believers with Him. Christ has the power of God because He is God. As God Jesus Christ ...
 - i. has the power to come to earth as a man.
 - ii. has the power to die and arise from the dead.
 - iii. has the power to ascend back into heaven.
 - iv. has the power to transfer a departed believer into heaven with Him.
 - v. has the power to return to earth
 - vi. has the power to bring all departed believers back to earth with Him.
3. **Proof 3:** the Word of the Lord proves His message; departed believers will return to earth with God. Their bodies will actually be raised from the dead before we that are alive are caught up. According to the Lord's Word those that are alive and remain will not precede those who have already fallen asleep. This is a strong point. Paul emphatically states that this revelation has come from the Lord. Therefore, believers should want no greater assurance. What is the revelation? We who are alive when the Lord returns shall not be caught up first. Again, how do we know this? How do we know that this is a fact, a real event that will actually take place? - By the Word of the God.

4:16-18 The events of the Lord's return and the resurrection are clearly spelled out in these verses.

1. *First*, the Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven. The very first event will be the appearance of the Lord God Himself. The supreme Majesty of the universe, the Lord Jesus Christ will rent the skies and miraculously appear in all His spectacular glory. Three spectacular events will occur.
 - a. The Lord God Himself will appear with a "*shout*" (*en keleusmati*). The word means a military command. The commander-in-chief of the universe will shout louder than any voice has ever shouted.⁴
 - b. The voice of the archangel will cry out.⁵ What will they cry? His shout will probably be the rallying cry for all the armies of the heavenly angels to join in the praise of the glorious event. Christ taught that the heavenly angels would be with Him when He returned to earth.
 - c. The trump of God shall sound. ⁶ The trumpet has always been for the purpose of arousing attention and warning. The whole universe—both earth and heaven, believers, and angels—will be

² Jh.6:40; 1Corth.15:3-4 2Corth.4:14

³ 2Coth.5:6-8

⁴ Joel 2:11

⁵ 1Thess.4:16

⁶ Matt.24:31; 1Corth.15:52

aroused; and all unbelievers will be warned. The Lord God Himself is now appearing and the events of the end time are now being launched upon earth.

2. *Second*, the dead in Christ shall rise first. Why? Because of the Lord's great love and care. The first expression of love and care will be shown to those dear saints who had passed through the shadow of death.
 - a. Only departed believers (dead in Christ) will arise; no unbelievers will be resurrected, not at that point.
 - b. It will be the bodies of the departed believers that are resurrected. The believers themselves, that is, their spirits, are already with the Lord. Their bodies are being raised and transformed to live forever with God. The shout of the Lord to "*come forth*" will call together all the atoms of a person's body, no matter where the various parts of a person's body may lie. The atoms of a person's body will be transformed to structure an eternal and perfect body.
 - c. The bodies of the departed believers will arise first—arise before we who are alive are caught up.
3. *Third*, we who are alive will be caught up right after the dead have risen. There will be a glorious transformation of our bodies just as there will be of those whose bodies have decayed in the earth. "*For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*" 1Corth.15:53.
 - a. The nature of the believer's present body is corruptible and mortal; the nature of his new body will be incorruptible and immortal.
 - b. The word "*must*" in 1Corth.15:54 show the absolute necessity for the change of man's body. If man is to live with God, his body must be changed. It is essential, a must, an absolute necessity if man is to live forever.
4. *Fourth*, the great union of the living with the dead will take place. We shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord. We shall be reunited with all our loved ones, even more, all believers—our loved ones and those whom we have never known—shall be united together with us into perfect and eternal beings. What a day of reunion and rejoicing that will be!
5. As wonderful as the reunion of believers will be, the most wonderful event will be the experience of seeing our Lord face to face for the very first time and living with Him. Everything will take place in the blink of an eye. Suddenly...
 - a. we will be standing in mid-air and transformed into perfect men and women.
 - b. we will be standing in the clouds in the midst of teeming millions.
 - c. we will be transformed in the midst of the spectacular glory and majesty, dominion, and power of the Lord God Himself!

The great reunion with family and believers will not be the occupation of our thoughts. Christ will be! The Lord God Himself in all His majestic glory and sovereignty will consume our attention and praise and adoration. The whole jest of what Paul is saying is that Jesus Christ Himself will be the total focus of our attention.

The present exhortation: "*comfort one another with these words.*" God does not reveal the events of the end time to satisfy curiosity. He tells us about the glorious events so that we can prepare and comfort one another. There is no need for discouragement on this earth; no need for extreme sorrow and grief; no need for hopelessness; and no need for ignorance. The Lord Himself has given us the most wonderful hope—the hope of living forever face to face with Him—of worshipping and serving Him forever in a new heaven and earth!

LESSON:

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 Hope In God's Timetable

Now the focus shifts to the return of Christ to judge the earth. Paul is speaking to believers: "*brothers,*" The Thessalonians have been well educated by Paul regarding future events. This does not mean that they knew everything, but evidently Paul felt that their understanding was adequate.

- "*Times*" (chronon) means chronological time, the events that follow one another and roll in and away from one another.
- "*Seasons*" (kairon) means the particular time and the nature of the events that are to take place. There are two reasons why they didn't need any more data.

Jesus made it clear that no one knows the exact time when Jesus will return. *Matthew 24:36: "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."* Therefore, there was no need to discuss or for Paul to write about the times and seasons. ⁷But they knew what to look for in the world – they were to recognize the season by looking around at the signs of the times:

- i. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and the Sadducees for being unable to discern the season by looking around. He told them in, *Matt. 16:2-3 ... "When it is evening, you say, it will be fair weather, for the sky*

⁷ <http://www.rondaniel.com/library/52-1Thessalonians/1Thessalonians0501.html>

is red. And in the morning, there will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening. Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times?"

- ii. We too have been educated on how to discern the signs of the times. The Bible has spelled it out for us. For example, we can look at the mindset of man to determine if we are in the last days. *2Tim. 3:1-4 "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God..."*
- iii. Another sign of the times is that the church itself becomes corrupted: *2Tim. 4:3-4 "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but {wanting} to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths."*

In our generation, sound doctrine and bible teaching isn't what most people in the church want to hear. They want feel-good messages, seeker-sensitivity, and acceptance of all "*lifestyle choices*." They want edification without rebuke. They want fellowship without accountability. Saints, look at the seasons, it is so clear: **We are in the last days!** The reason Paul would not need to write is introduced in 5:2

5:2 They know perfectly well "*that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night*", but do not know the date of Christ's return to judge the world. The "*Day of the Lord*" is a phrase that is used many times in the Old Testament (Is.2:12; 13:6-9 etc.). The prophets used the term to describe God's judgment on the pagan nations surrounding Israel.

"The day of the Lord" is a period of time in which God will deal with wicked men directly and dramatically in fearful judgment. Today a man may be a blasphemer of God; an atheist can denounce God and teach bad doctrine. Seemingly God does nothing about it. But the day designated in scripture as "*the day of the Lord*" is coming when God will punish human sin, and He will deal in wrath and in judgment with a Christ-rejecting world. One thing we are sure of, that God in His own way will bring every soul into judgment (The Thessalonian Epistles, p.76).

Remember, that day, the day when God will bring every soul into judgment is what the Bible calls "*the day of the Lord*." When is Christ returning? When the earth has reached such a depraved condition that it is hopelessly lost forever and ripe for the judgments of "*the day of the Lord*." We see that there are three main distinctives of the "*Day of the Lord*."

1. It will be **unexpected (5:2b)**. "*The day of the Lord*" will come when the world of unbelievers feel a great sense of security (false security)—when they are saying "*peace and safety*." *Revelation 16:15*, Jesus says, "*Behold, I come like a thief!*" Just as a burglar does not announce his arrival, Jesus will come when He is least expected.
2. It will be **destructive (5:3a)**. "*The Day of the Lord*" comes when they are saying "*peace and safety*", a terrible destruction will be lying right over the horizon. **Peace** - they say "*everything's okay on the inside*." **Safety** - they say, "*everything's okay on the outside*." But it's not okay inside or out, and anyone who says it is either lying or deceived. The Lord is going to bring destruction to this world, and when it happens, people are going to be totally unaware. Not because they weren't warned, but because they didn't listen. Suddenly, out of nowhere, the great and terrible day of the Lord will fall upon the world.
3. It will be **inescapable (5:3b)**. When the "*Day of the Lord*" finally comes and God's fury is poured out on the earth, there will be no place to run and no place to hide. He uses a fascinating analogy to make his point. He compares it to a woman who is having labor pains. It will be just like the travail that suddenly strikes a woman who is with child. The pain, suffering, and destruction will be relentless and inescapable for unbelievers. No one will escape! Believers won't be around anyway for the "*Day of the Lord*" because we will be Raptured before it begins.

Evidently "*they and them*" (v3) refers to those left behind after the removal of the church, that is, ALL non-Christians.

1 Thessalonians 5:4-8 Hope In Being Children Of Light

5:4 Paul assures them and clears away any confusion and concern for the Thessalonians. ⁸But we're not going to be caught like this. We know that the signs of the times indicate that this is coming soon. We know that God has called us to holiness and righteousness, and steadfastness of hope. And we know that the wrath of God will be poured out on the ungodliness of this earth in that great and terrible "*Day of the Lord*."

Genuine believers will be blessed and unbelievers will suffer the wrath of God. There are three strong reasons why the believer is not to be caught off guard by "*the Day of the Lord*."

1. The believer does not live in the sphere of darkness in that they should be concerned about being caught up

⁸ <http://www.rondaniel.com/library/52-1Thessalonians/1Thessalonians0501.html>

in that judgment. No true believer is ignorant of the truth; no true believer dwells in the darkness of ignorance. Therefore, he is to be anticipating the Lord's return. He is not to be caught by surprise when it occurs.

5:5 Because of this, how a believer behaves while he is on earth matters greatly to God.

2. The believer is a child of light. This simply means that the believer is a child of God, for God is light (1Jh.1:5). He knows God; therefore, he is not to be caught off guard nor surprised when the Lord comes.
3. The believer is a child of the day. It means that the believer will escape the judgment of God. He is a child who is accepted by God; therefore, he will be accepted in that "*Day of the Lord's*" return. He will not have to face the terrible "*Day of the Lord*" and suffer the judgment of God's wrath. He is a child of the day, of God's glorious salvation and deliverance. Therefore, the believer should not be walking in darkness with his mind and thoughts upon the world. He should be walking about, always praying and thinking about the things of God and the utter necessity to reach people for Christ, for the great and terrible day of the Lord is coming. Light and day represent God and His children while darkness and night represent the lost.

5:6 Paul reminds us in verse 6 that, as believers, we need to be alert. The believer is not to sleep, but to watch and be sober. Sleep refers to spiritual sleep. When a person is asleep, naturally, he is not alert, nor involved in what is going on around him. When a believer is spiritually asleep, he is not alert, nor involved in the things of God. His mind and behavior are not concerned with the things of God. He slumbers, dozes, and sleeps. Therefore, he will be caught off guard when the Lord returns.

- To "*watch*" means to be alert and on guard for Christ.
- To be "*sober*" means to be rigid in discipline and in control for Christ; to live a strict life of righteousness and godliness, ever looking for the return of the Lord. These are two facts about the believer.

5:7 However, for those that sleep, can be identified as fallen asleep spiritually.

- They no longer are alert to the things of God.
- They no longer are alive to God—thinking and keeping their thoughts upon God.
- They no longer are worshipping God, praying, and fellowshiping with God and His people.
- They no longer are anticipating the return of Christ.
- They no longer are active for God; serving and working for God.

Discipline and control in righteousness and godliness are the furthest things from their minds.

- Some are identified with the night and with evil behavior. The person who sleeps, sleeps in the night and the person who gets drunk gets drunk in the night. Therefore, if a believer carouses around with those who are of the night, he is identifying himself with the sinners of the world.

As believers, we are not to be walking around, insensitive to what is happening around us. Some believers live like this. Their lives are preoccupied with their job, their hobbies, and other things besides the Word of God. Their attitude toward the Word of God is *'I will go to church on Sunday for an hour or so; but that's all I have time for.'* This is how the world functions, and Paul is reminding us that we are not like the world. We are not to be "*asleep*."

5:8 This is the believer's duty: to be sober to protect himself; that is, he must be mentally awake, alert, and watchful to protect himself. He must make sure that he stays spiritually sober and well protected. This poses two questions:

1. **How can the believer stay sober and protected?** By putting on the armor of God. What is the armor of God?
 - a. There is the **breastplate of faith and love**. The breastplate protected the heart of the soldier. The heart of the believer must be protected. His heart must be committed and focused upon Jesus Christ and His cause for world conquest. It is the breastplate of faith and love that will protect our heart and keep it focused upon Christ and His cause.
 - i. Faith protects our heart: when we really believe that Jesus Christ saves us from sin and death and delivers us from the judgment of God, We stay sober: we live righteously and godly in this present world and look for the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ! Our faith in Christ keeps us sober.
 - ii. Love protects our heart: when we really see the love Christ has for us—that He actually bore our sins and punishment on the cross—then we are broken before Him and bow in humble adoration and love. Love floods us, for He did so much for us. We never have to die; we never have to bear the punishment of sin—all because He loved us! Therefore, our hearts reach out to Him broken and pouring love back to Him. We stay sober: we live righteously and godly and look for His return because we love Him. Our love keeps us sober.
 - b. There is the **helmet of the Christian soldier, the hope of salvation**. There is only one way we can be prepared for the return of Christ and escape the judgment of God: we must keep our minds and lives focused upon Christ. How can we do this? By protecting our minds with the helmet of God's

armor—the hope of salvation. We are to eat, drink, and sleep salvation—the great hope God has given—the guarantee of the deliverance from this present evil world. Our hope of salvation keeps us sober. *"For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head..." Is.59:16-17.*

1 Thessalonians 5:9-11 Hope In Our Salvation

5:9 We are saved from the world, the flesh, and the devil. But first and foremost, we are rescued from the wrath of God that we did not deserve except for the grace of God. Our appointment to wrath was "*scheduled*" in two ways:

- i. First, because of what Adam did to us and the whole human race, we are appointed to wrath (Rom. 5:14-19).
- ii. Second, because of our own sin we are appointed to wrath. When Jesus died on the cross, He stood in our place in our appointment to wrath, and "*re-schedules*" us with an appointment to obtain salvation. God has designed for us as believers that we should "*obtain (Gr peripoiesis) salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

2. Why is the believer to stay sober and protect himself? There are two significant reasons.

- a. God has not appointed us to wrath, but to salvation. The only way to escape the wrath of God is to stay sober and focused upon Jesus Christ. When God saved us, He appointed us to receive salvation from sin, death, and judgment to come. He did not appoint us to death and wrath. Therefore, there is no excuse for a believer to fall asleep and return to the world of darkness. A person who is not sober will suffer the wrath of God. *"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth..." Col.3:5a.*
- b. **5:10** Christ died for us. Note the words "*wake or sleep*": they mean alive or departed. When Christ returns, whether we are still alive on the earth or departed, we shall live together with Him forever and ever. This is why He died; the very reason He went to the cross: that we might have the glorious privilege of living together with Him throughout all eternity.

5:11 Paul repeats this again (4:18). The believer is to minister by comforting and edifying others. God has delivered us from the wrath to come and given us the glorious hope of living face to face with Him forever. Therefore, we are not to sleep, but we are to be sober, awake, alert, and watchful for that glorious day.

- We are to "*comfort*" (*parakaleite*) each other: exhort (urge), encourage, and admonish each other.
- We are to "*edify*" (*oikodomeite*) each other: strengthen and build each other up, just as they were already doing, which is one of the reasons for fellowship in the church.

SUMMARY:

5:1-3 Paul lets them know that he doesn't need to write about the times and seasons because they already know that the "*Day of the Lord*" is coming like a thief in the night. This event will be unexpected, destructive and inescapable. Once they think they are at peace and safe, a sudden disaster will come like the labor pains of a woman causing no escape.

5:4-8 Paul lets them know that they are brethren that will not be overtaken as a thief because they are not in the dark to these things. They have been saved and are the children of the light and children of the day. Darkness obscures our view. The light makes manifest. This is not the time to sleep but this is the time to be alert and clearheaded. Remember what Jesus said in *Mark 13:33-37* "*Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the {appointed} time is. It is like a man, away on a journey, {who} upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, {assigning} to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. Therefore, be on the alert - for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, at cockcrow, or in the morning - lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!' "* Too many of have gotten spiritually sleepy. Whoever is sinning, seems to think the darkness will cover the sin. Those who have drunk too much wine lose control of their actions. But being of the Day, stay alert by putting on the breastplate of faith and love and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

5:9-11 God chose to save us, not to pour out His anger on us. Christ died for us that whether dead or alive, we should live together with Him. That's why Paul tells them keep doing what they have been doing— encourage, comfort, and build-up one another. They'll find hope in being alert and watchful because they were prepared on the "*Day of Lord*"—His return. And they were helpful to one another, encouraging and lifting the other up by allowing others to see that there will be a glorious return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! He's Coming Soon!

APPLICATION:

God has a time table. His Word proves that He's coming back again! Our hope is found in Him as children of light and not of darkness. He didn't appoint us to suffer wrath but our hope is received in His plan of Salvation.