

Meditation: 1 Thessalonians 1: 9-10 For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Scripture Introduction: We're going to be reading from 1 Thes. 5 so as you turn in your bible there, I'm going to introduce you to the Thessalonians. Who here remembers Chain letters? They were letters that you receive and copy to five other people. Who here remembers email forwards? Who here still gets email forwards? sends email forwards? They were letters meant to be distributed to as many as possible. In modern terms they were like a link or a meme. But they sometimes contained veiled threats if you didn't pass it on. Well, that's kind of like what we're reading today. It's a letter that the apostle Paul sent to some people in Thessalonica, and he demanded that it be passed around, 1 Thes. 5: 27. So we're reading a forward, a chain letter. As with any letter not sent specifically to us, it's tempting to throw it in the trash. But before we chuck Thessalonians in the trash on principle, let us judge the letter by its own merits. Perhaps there is still some application for us though we're separated by hundreds of years.

This letter is from Paul, Silas, and Timothy. They were staying in Corinth for about 18 months between AD 49-51. Paul, Silas, and Timothy had traveled to Thessalonica, a port city of about 100,000 along significant north-south and east-west trade routes. They had preached there in the synagogues and been welcomed by a Jason according to Acts 17. But they were run out of the city by the Jews. It seems that Timothy, without Paul, had just returned from Thessalonica at the time of this writing. According to chapter 4 we get the distinct impression that some of the saints in Thessalonica had died. So in the context of a new church in a pagan context, amidst persecution from the jews, after the death of key members, Paul pens these words. Let us pray before we read God's holy word.

Prayer of Illumination:

Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Introduction: What we're waiting for reveals our heart's desire.

What are we waiting for? Were some of you waiting and waiting for Christmas? Were some of you waiting for 2014 to be over? Who was waiting eagerly for the Steelers/Ravens game last night? Are you waiting for a new governor? Perhaps you are waiting for school to be done, or for a job, or for a spouse, a child, another child, a change in administration, a surgery, retirement, or grandchildren. Those are good things, but sometimes the things we're waiting for aren't good things: a punishment, a treatment, a collapse, a trial, a sentence, a truth, a death. What are we waiting for? Answering that question is a window into our hearts.

Some of the children in my house were eagerly waiting for Christmas. But there's a good way and a bad way to wait for Christmas. There's a "working waiting" and a "wasting waiting." Who here has ever felt: Christmas is so far away! Will Christmas ever come? I want my presents now. I can't wait to give my presents. You could waste that time leading up to Christmas by whining, pining, coveting, lusting, and coping. Or you could use that time leading up to Christmas to work. At the very least it makes the time go by quicker, but at best, working prepares you better for Christmas. How so? There's certain things one can only do, or best do, before Christmas. Usually people work to decorate before Christmas rather than on Christmas or after. Gifts seem more thoughtful if bought before Christmas rather than after. Nice Christmas meals require preparation. Online ordering requires working while you wait; you can't wait til the last minute.

For some of you I'm stating the obvious. For some of us, planning and preparing is what we remember to do the night before or the day of.

So there's a working waiting and a wasting waiting. As it is with Christmas so it is in waiting for the day of the Lord. With Christmas the longest you'll have to wait is 364 days. With the day of the Lord...well it depends, but it could be a lifetime. When one has to wait years, it can be more tempting to move from a working waiting to a wasting waiting. One begins to wonder if the day will ever come, if it's far off or close by. If it seems far off, one is all the more tempted to relax. To put your feet up. To take it easy while we wait. We can waste away the days in laziness instead of working diligently to prepare for the day of the Lord.

So how does one diligently prepare for the day of the Lord?

According to our text, preparing for the day of the Lord means physically and spiritually preparing for trouble, and reacting quickly when it comes. We do this not to work salvation for ourselves but because we have already been saved.

Proposition: Because our salvation has already been accomplished in Christ, we should work with faith, hope, and love while we wait.

Point 1: Let's look at verses 1-3. "You have no need to have anything written to you." Look at how encouraging Paul is. He's saying, I know that you already know this, but I'm just going to bring it to mind again and add some nuance. So too church you already know that we can't set a date on the day of the Lord. But let's look at this truth closely again. "You're fully aware the day of the Lord will come..." What's the day of the Lord? Well, it's a day when the Holy Lord comes to judge, to separate the wheat from the chaff, the godly from the ungodly, the righteous from the wicked. The day of the Lord is that final day when Jesus comes again bodily on a warhorse with angel armies to wage war against those who oppose him and his people.

What you may not know is that there isn't just **one** day of the Lord. There is one final day of the Lord but as we look through the Old Testament there are multiple days of the Lord. Isaiah 13:1-9 refers to the day of destruction for Babylon in history. Jeremiah 46:10 mentions the battle between Pharaoh Neco and Babylon as a "day of the Lord" for Egypt. Ezekiel 13:5 says that false prophets caused Israel to be militarily unprepared for a "day of the Lord." Throughout Joel, the day of the Lord refers to a locust invasion of Israel that happened in history which foreshadowed the final judgment. Amos 5 describes the day of the Lord for the northern kingdom of Israel when they were taken away by Assyria. He says "Don't desire the day of the Lord, it is darkness and not light." Obadiah verse 15 tells of a "day of the Lord" for Edom but salvation for God's people. It is referring to historical events. Zephaniah 1:7 refers to a "day of the Lord" for Jerusalem and the southern kingdom, one they experienced as Babylon took them away into captivity. Malachi 4:5 says the day of the Lord is when Jesus comes, the first time.

So, the day of the Lord is not merely the final second coming of Jesus. A Day of the Lord can refer to a day when God sends destruction upon his own people for resisting him. A Day of the Lord can refer to a day when God sends judgment on pagan countries for persecuting his people. A Day of the Lord can refer to natural disasters that God sends to test his people. A Day of the Lord can be a test for God's people to see how they react when he comes meekly, without disaster, plague or sword.

In a certain sense, we all have our own day of the Lord when we die and face judgment. It could be that all of ours will be the same if the Lord comes tomorrow. It could be that all of ours is the same if national disaster strikes tomorrow. But if the Lord does not come soon we will each have our own day of testing.

If the Day of the Lord is only the final reckoning we may be tempted to be lazy thinking "The world isn't going to end soon. Even if it does, I'll be fine, I've got my Jesus fire insurance. When the day of the Lord comes, all I have to do is say "I'm with Jesus." and I'll go to heaven." But what if the next day of the Lord is not the final one? What if it is a day of judgment for us as a nation? What if it's a day of judgment for you personally, some consequence for sin?

And it should go without saying that God doesn't rapture his people out of trial, just whisk them away to heaven when the going gets tough. Some Christians actually believe this. But in the Old Testament, God was with his people through trial: oppression, famine, sword. In the New Testament, God was with the apostles through their trials: imprisonment, poverty, trial. In the early church God was with his people through their persecution, dispersion, loneliness. And with saints today undergoing persecution God doesn't beam them up. He is with them through the trial. A day of the Lord may be close for any of us and we should not think we will be beamed up to heaven when trials come. God warns us beforehand, he sees us through, and he will bring us to heaven on the other side of any trial we face.

Jesus himself, in Luke 22:36, encourages his disciples to prepare themselves with knapsacks and swords. Why would he say this about the second coming?

The Day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night. Let's say you lived in a high crime area. You know that there are thieves in the area. You know they strike at night. What would you do? You would not engage in foolish fortunetelling about precisely which night they would come on. You would get ready. You would make sure all doors were sturdy and locked. You might have lights on outside. You would seek to secure your windows. You would have a defensive weapon handy. You would not leave valuables laying out. You might set up further security measures and protocols inside. So that if the thief comes you would be prepared to thwart him at several points.

So it is with the day of the lord. Some engage in pointless prognostication but the prudent prepare. And before we move on to spiritual preparation it would be prudent at this point to remind any who are not prepared for a thief in the night, to make ready for that eventuality.

Now with regard to spiritual preparation: We need to be ready to die. First of all, you need to repent and believe in Jesus initially if you haven't done so. That means submitting to baptism. That means coming before the elders to be examined as to your faith if it be real or only pretend. If you are not in Christ you will have to pay the penalty for your sins. The wages of sin is death. It is appointed for each man to die and after that to face judgment. You don't know if the thief comes tonight! Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.

For those of you who have already repented and believed, don't stop there. Be vigilant. You wouldn't prepare once for a thief in the night and think that you're set. Every night you would check locks, secure valuables, ready weapons. So too as a Christian we before we go to bed at night we should make sure that we have repented of sins done that day. We may need to do this to a person if we've sinned against someone. If we are angry at someone, we have been warned not to let the sun go down on our anger, therefore we should seek to be reconciled. We should pray and so set a guard over every area of weakness wherein we might be tempted. Spiritually, we are not without a weapon. The scripture says to take up the sword of the spirit which is the word of God. You arm yourself for spiritual battle, for temptation, by storing up the word in your heart. Memorize scriptures

that particularly speak to your temptations. Look to the life of our Lord who was the Word to see how he walked righteously in every aspect of the law.

If you were in a neighborhood where thieves were about and you had prepared for thieves but your neighbor hadn't it might be kind to mention something to him. So too, it is kind to mention something to our neighbors about the coming danger of death and hell so that they might prepare themselves. You don't have to hassle them about it. They will reap the consequences if they don't listen to you. But I'm sure if you love them, the Lord will reveal ways to reach them with the message despite initial dissent.

And there will be dissent. Others will be saying "there is peace and security." They will say there's no need to prepare, we're already safe. But God's word says they're not. Destruction is coming. So be especially skeptical of talk of peace and security. Do we not already have peace-keepers? Do we not have social security? And yet are they able to keep out a thief in the night? Speaking spiritually, beware of those who say "You're a good person. Surely trouble won't come to you, you're so religious. You don't hang with the wrong crowd or make foolish decisions so surely you won't find trouble unless you go seeking it. God will take care of you, let go and let God." Much as we might like to hear things like that, we know they are false assurances. As uncomfortable and socially awkward as it is to prepare for sudden danger, the scripture is clear, we should prepare physically and spiritually. Trials may come so quickly that there's no time for last minute preparations.

Anyone who has experienced labor knows this is an apt metaphor. We recently had our sixth child on October 23rd. Annie had an appointment in the afternoon and she had been in labor since the night before so she packed her bag to stay overnight at the hospital and have the baby. Meanwhile I packed my bag thinking I'd join her as soon as Annie's parents arrived to watch the other kids. Thank goodness that date with her parents was arranged beforehand. The hospital didn't keep her, they sent her home. So she labored at home for awhile but when she finally decided it was indeed time to go in, there would have been no time for me to pack my bag. We left the house at 7:00pm and drove 30 minutes to the hospital and Annelise Margaret was born at 7:53pm. We cut it very close.

If you aren't prepared for delivery there might be a mess and people might be in danger.

If you aren't prepared for the Day of the Lord there might be a mess and people might be in danger.

Since we know a trial is coming the question then becomes, What kind of watch are we keeping? a sleepy, inebriated watch or a careful, abstemious watch. Paul uses the metaphors of night and day, sleep and drunkenness. Let's examine each of these to be clear about what Paul is saying.

He says "You're not in darkness for that *day* to surprise you... for you are children of the light, children of the day." He's speaking to the Thessalonian Christians, to whom the light of the gospel has dawned. They now know good and evil. They can be free to be honest about their sin because it's been forgiven in Christ. Jesus is the light of the world so they are children of light if they've been adopted by God. Light stands for truth, holiness, justice, goodness, clarity, honesty. "We are not of the night or darkness." Paul associates the night with wicked deeds intended to be done in secret, in anonymity, deeds not appropriate for society. The Christian, in contrast, is marked by honesty, trustworthiness, responsibility.

Paul says "let us not sleep." He does not mean actual sleep "Phew." He is using sleep as a metaphor. But a metaphor for what? It's slightly confusing because he used sleep as a metaphor for death in chapter 4:15 where it says "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." You see alive contrasted with asleep. And again in chapter 5:10 "who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him." In 5:10 Paul is saying whether we're a living believer or a dead believer we will live with Christ in heaven. But in chapter 5 verse 6 sleep doesn't seem to refer to the death of believers, but rather the malaise of unbelievers. Those who have not had the light of the gospel shine into their lives, go through their life as if sleepwalking. They look awake, they talk, they move, they interact, but they're interacting with a dream, not reality. They say things that don't make any sense. They interact with

objects that aren't there and sometimes run into objects that are there. Spiritually speaking, those who are asleep know a holy God exists but act as if he doesn't.

Do we have any heavy sleepers here? A train could be driving by your window and you wouldn't wake up. Alarms could be going off, but you just ignore them. People could be shaking you, but you sleep right on through. That's the kind of oblivion that those without the light of the gospel have. You can yell, you can shake, you can sound the alarm but they won't wake until the Lord has shined the light of the gospel into their hearts. They are oblivious to the fact that judgment is coming, danger is near at hand, but they do not move.

We know that this is the metaphor Paul is using because he links sleep with stupor, wakefulness with sobriety. Have you ever been around a drunk person before? Alcohol is a depressant and drunk people are a little slow. They can look fine, they can say they're fine, but their reaction time is going to be a little delayed and their moral conscience is going to be a little diminished. This is why drunk driving is so dangerous. One's reactions being a little slower than normal can have devastating effects. One may be slow to put on the brakes when a car stops in front of you. One may be slow to steer the car through a curve and wind up going over the curb. Spiritually, those without Christ are slow. Dangerous temptation is facing them and they pull out too late. Deadly warnings are going off and they take heed too late.

So Paul is saying let's not sleep through our Christian walk. Let's not be spiritually slow-witted and late. What does sleepy slow-wittedness look like? Perhaps it looks like always being stooped over a screen and being late to react to the world around you. Perhaps it looks like noticing a dangerous situation and not doing anything about it. Proverbs 22:3 and 27:12 warn us that "The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty." Have you been entertaining yourself into a stupor? Have you been plowing through warning signs as if in a trance? Physically speaking take heed of the warning signs in our culture, see what dangers are approaching and take pains to avoid them or prepare for them. Spiritually speaking, if you are in a lazy state of coping Christianity, of cruising Christianity, wake up! There is danger ahead.

How do we prepare spiritually? By putting on spiritual armor. Look at verse 8 "the breastplate of faith and love." We prepare defensively. We prepare by putting on character traits as if they were armor. What is Paul referring to when he says "Faith?" We usually think of that word in English to mean believing something that can't be seen, like believing God is real, or believing God will save. In the Greek, the main emphasis is on faithfulness, reliability, trustworthiness. Prepare for the day of the Lord through reliable commitment to the Lord and his purposes. What does Paul mean by "love?" Agape, Love of God primarily. And the love by which God is characterized by, God is love, God is agape. Prepare for danger by stirring up your love for God and loving in a godly way. Paul also says put on the helmet of hope. Shield your mind by waiting expectantly for God. Put on a mindset of expectation. You're just waiting for God to do something. You leave room for God and don't do it all yourself. You stretch out in faith in a way that would look foolish to anyone who didn't know that wildly loving and powerful God that we know in Christ. That's how you prepare spiritually.

Point 3: The day of the Lord brings danger for Christians, but not eternal danger like there is for those outside of Christ. Look at verse 9 "For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ," Who is the "us" there? Is it everybody? Is it just the apostles? The us refers to Christians. He died for us that we might live with him, even if we die. It is part of the false prophecy of security to say that Jesus died for everybody, that all will inherit eternal life. This is precisely the peace and security that Paul warns us against here. The only way to be secure is to be in Christ. Repent and believe in Christ alone. Then even when you're not secure you will be, in his hand.

This is the glorious gospel, Christ died for us. Not those that deserved it, not those who through perseverance had muscled their way into the promised land. Christ died for weak sinners, who like the Thessalonians can become discouraged, especially when facing the reality of death of believers in their midst. It is precisely into this situation that we need to hear Paul's words "whether we are awake or asleep." The salvation that Christ purchased is powerful to change our lives from darkness to light. The salvation that Christ wrought is powerful enough to raise our dead friends in the Lord to new life in the heavenly places.

All of our preparing, all of our working while we wait, all of our putting on the armor of faith, hope and love, flows from this truth, that Christ died to save us. It isn't the other way around that we prepare, work, and have faith and then Christ saves us because of our merit. No, the Christian life is set up opposite that. First, we are given salvation in Christ, then that powerful salvation works its way from our new hearts into every aspect of our life. Because our salvation is assured we can hope against despair. Because our salvation has been obtained already we can have faith despite what our eyes see. Because we have already been loved, we can radically, graciously love others.

On January 13th of my eighth grade year I walked down the street to my friends' house to hang out and they were having bible study. So I went along with it. They went through the ten commandments and I was convinced of my sinfulness and need for a savior. But I continued to wallow in my sin. Several months later I got so frustrated that my idols weren't working out that I ran away from home. I ended up at the local PCA pastor's house. After spending the night, the pastor's wife came in to talk to me about my relationship with my parents. I said that I wouldn't respect them until they respected me. And she said "Then it's never going to happen." Then she told me about how God adopted us as his sons and daughters. She told me about how Jesus had died for me before I was ever born.

Jesus loved me before I ever loved him. That's the message that changed my life. That salvation before I ever moved toward him, was what melted my stony heart and gave me a heart of love and faith and belief. All of my preparations, my putting on of Christian disciplines, my working while waiting, my eager expectation for the Lord to act is in response to his preparing a place for me. You see it isn't really how great we are at preparing that saves us. What saves us is that God has already prepared salvation for us. Did he not say as much when our Lord walked the earth. In my father's house are many rooms, I go to prepare a place for you. The Lord is the prepper. He's working on his house, preparing to house you, like a groom in ancient days would build rooms off of his Father's house, so the Lord prepares a place for us, his beloved church. "But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city." Hebrews 11:6