

Discerning the Days

First Things

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

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Crossroads Ministries
301 S. 8th Street
Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

This morning, I want to invite you to open your Bibles to the book of 1 Thessalonians 5, a little bit toward the backside of your New Testament. If you're a guest, if you're a visitor, or maybe you haven't had the opportunity to worship with us in some time, I want to welcome you. Even though we're in chapter 5 of five chapters, we are walking very slowly, very strategically through what we know as the book of 1 Thessalonians. And the reason that this book is so strategic, the reason it is so timely, is that chronologically speaking this is the very first letter from the Apostle Paul that the Lord not only gives us but he gave the early church. You say, why is that strategic? Because 2,000 years later, when we use the term Christian or Christianity, there are so many varieties of expressions, there's so many opinions, there's so many preferences. In fact, over time, what has happened is that we have established groups, some small, some greater in size, that have established creeds and dogmas and eventually we've had debates and divisions. What 1 Thessalonians allows us to do is to recapture, recapture those first believers and the challenges they faced and also the experiences of the glory of God that they celebrated.

When you read the book of 1 Thessalonians, beginning in chapter 4, verse 13, toward pretty much the end of it, we enter into what you and I would call the subject matter of the Second Coming. Now the Bible says in 1 Peter 5 that as you and I get closer to his return, there will be mockers, there will be scoffers who say that it's all a fairy tale, he's not coming back and yet here in 1 Thessalonians, almost 20% of what we know as its content is about the Second Coming. The reason this is strategic is from the very beginning of the early church, what we know as the Second Coming has not only been a primary doctrine, it has been one that has been spoken of, preached on, and even the Lord himself gave us quite a bit of information. Last time we gathered in 1 Thessalonians, in chapter 4, we read, we studied that which we just heard sung and we joined along, there is coming a day with the voice of the archangel, with the shout of the trumpet, that those who are dead in Christ and those who are alive in Christ will be raised up together and they will meet the Lord in the air. Verse 18 says wherefore, comfort one another with those words.

Now I know at times I make the following statement, and some of you look at me like a calf at a new gate when I say it but did you know there are parts of the Bible that I don't

like? Now I didn't say there weren't parts I didn't believe. I believe it all. In fact, I'm even a fan of the concordance and that's not even inspired, but nonetheless. Chapter 5. I wish, and I'm not God, I wish it ended in chapter 4. I wish it did because chapter 5 talks about the days between now and then, that which we have to navigate, that which we have to journey, and as we're going to discover in just a moment, that the closer that we get to the return of Jesus Christ, the darker the days are going to become. The closer we get to his return, the more rebellious and defiant humanity will become and so today as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have to address how do we discern these days? How do we render decisions? How do we exercise wisdom? How do we live our life knowing that chapter 4 can happen at any moment?

But we all woke up to chapter 5 today. As we began chapter 5 verses 1 through 5, he says,

1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. 2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. 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. 4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. 5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

So what's being communicated here? And again, as I like to do oftentimes, I just want to walk through some very critical questions that we need to ask because when it comes to the Second Coming, you know I joke all the time that when you get two Baptists together, you're going to get three different opinions. Well, when it comes to the Second Coming, if we get two of us together, oftentimes we get about 14 or 15 different opinions and so I want to walk through some of these basic concepts here so that we can more clearly understand as we, every day we wake up, get closer to the return of Jesus Christ, how do we discern? How do we navigate? How do we walk?

The first question we have to ask is the "who." There's actually two groups of people that are being addressed in this passage. It begins with the word "ye have no need." Now I understand that word "ye" sounds a little archaic, but in modern linguistic usage, the word "you," y-o-u, can be both singular and plural. That word "ye" is plural and the reason that that is important is it is designating all of those who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is recognizing that those who've come to an understanding of their sinful condition, recognize they can never do performance-based theology. They can never earn their way to heaven, buy their way to heaven, but Jesus Christ has paid the price with his death and his resurrection. Those who have called on his name, they are the "ye" of this passage.

"Ye brethren, I have no need to write of you of the times and the season," and then in verse 5, "you are the children of light." In John 8:12, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." So there's the "ye," the believers, and then there's the "they." Notice what it says about "they." It says that like a thief in the night, they shall be overcome. It says they are

of the night. They are of the darkness. In Colossians 1, it says that to those of us who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, that we used to be in the kingdom of darkness, but God has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son. Every single one of us at one point was a part of this kingdom of darkness. We all used to be "they's." The key today is going to be are you one of the "ye's"?

Notice what it says in verse 5, they're children of darkness. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 it says that Satan is the god of this world. Listen to this next statement, and he has blinded the eyes of those who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you ever asked yourself that rhetorical question: how can the world advocate what the world advocates? How can they celebrate what they celebrate? The reason why is spiritually they're blind. They're children of the night. They are children of darkness. And what we're going to see in this passage is even though there's communication to us as believers, all the end of chapter 4 is about us one day going to be with the Lord, what we find out here in chapter 5 is what befalls those who reject him, what befalls those who continually rebel against him and how the word of God contrasts their future to ours.

Now here's the big question. Everybody loves the question when we talk about the Second Coming of "when." We always love to talk about the chronology and all the possibilities and all the projections and such. It's interesting in verse 1, this statement is given, but of the times and the seasons. Those are very chronological terms that the Lord is utilizing there. Allow me to break those terms down for just a moment. When the Bible speaks of the times, the times that one is in or the times that lie ahead, that is a chronological reference. In fact, you get to the book of Revelation, particularly in chapters 11 through 14, you will discover that in the "end days," at the "last days," one of the things you'll discover is that the Lord uses days, months, and years, almost as if he wants to get so specific we can't miss it. It talks about 1,360 days. It talks about 42 months. It talks about three and a half years. All of these are utilized to explain the chronology of the "last days" and these events that are "unfolding."

Those are the times. What about the "seasons"? You know what's interesting, all the way back in the book of Genesis 1, when it says the Lord created the greater light for the day, the lesser light for the night, and he "flung the stars" also, do you know what it says about all those celestial beings? That they are for the "signs and seasons." You get to Colossians 1 and it says that there is a day coming in the future where there will be a resurgence of those entities coming into play when it comes to humanity's understanding where they are in God's plan for planet earth. So you think about those two things, there are days, there are months, there are years that are given, there are signs, there are seasons, even among the sun, the moon, the stars themselves.

Now I want you to notice what it says in verse 1, "I have no need to write to you concerning these things." Now I want you to hear what God's saying. If you go back into chapter 4, those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, those who one day will be caught up together with him, he's basically saying that you don't need to start looking at the calendar, you don't need to start looking at the moon and the sun and all those things. Those things are not for you.

Now let me go back to Acts 1 for just a moment. This early church that we're celebrating here in 1 Thessalonians, they weren't just 20 years removed from the empty tomb, they were about 40 days and the Bible records that both in Jerusalem and in Galilee and other places that Jesus brought those early apostles together and when he did, he instructed them, he taught them according to Acts 1 for about 40 days. Can you imagine being in seminary for 40 days with Jesus just sitting there teaching and talking and sharing? Verse 7 of Acts 1, Jesus is about to ascend and I think oftentimes we give undue criticism to those apostles. They ask him a very important question, "Is this the time that you're going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Now they didn't ask would Israel be rebirthed like you and I are living in real time today. They didn't ask if it would become a reality and they said, "When are you going to establish the kingdom?" Here's what they're asking, "When are you going to sit on your throne in Jerusalem reigning over all of the world?" Verse 7, I love this in Acts 1, listen to what Jesus says, "But of the times and the seasons, you have no need that I share unto you." Can I tell you what Jesus was saying? This is important, is that every time we look up and the sun is a different color, the moon is a different color, or we hear all these reports in these days and those months and this year, what he's saying is, go back to verse 18 of chapter 4, you don't have to worry about that mess. You don't have to worry about it. You don't have to get out your stopwatch when somebody notices something crazy happening in the cosmos and go, "Oh wow, is this the last 42 months? Is this the last 1,300 days? Where are we?" He says you don't have to worry about that. Why? Because of chapter 4 because there's coming a day where those who are dead in Christ and alive in Christ are taken up to be with Christ before all this takes place.

And then there's the "where." Notice what it says in verse 3, it says there shall be sudden destruction. What does that mean? That is inferring that nobody's going to get any lead time, nobody's going to get any heads up. In other words, for those that are classified as the "they" of this passage, it's going to happen suddenly. You know, one of the great, shall we say, dystopian movies of the last two to three decades, a movie that made a whole lot of money and a lot of recognition, was entitled "Independence Day." You may remember it, and for those of you who haven't seen it, it's been out so long I'm going to spoil it for you anyway. But in this movie, humanity, earth, is invaded by aliens, for lack of better terms. They systematically put their ships all over the earth, and right as they're about to initiate their destruction, one of the high military commanders gives this ominous warning, "They have coordinated themselves." You say, "Why is that important to this passage?" Because those that reside in North America didn't have the opportunity to see what was happening in Europe and get prepared for it. It's not like New Year's Eve, where we see the time change come throughout all of the land, and we can prepare for it. It happens suddenly. It is destruction. It is without warning. So here's what God is saying. For those who have rejected Jesus, for those that have rebelled against him, there is coming a day where sudden destruction, according to what we just read, will come upon them as a thief in the night.

So what is being spoken of here? I want you to notice a phrase that's in verse 2 and 3 that's very rare in the New Testament, but very frequent in the Old Testament, "For you

yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. When they shall say, peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them as the travail of a woman with child, and they shall not escape." This is a very particular phrase, the day of the Lord. And by the way, you can look at this phrase all throughout the Old Testament, whether you're in the book of Joel, the book of Isaiah, the book of Malachi, the book of Zephaniah, Haggai, wherever you find yourself, and one thing you'll discover is this: it is not a pleasant experience. The day of the Lord, as we'll discuss in just a moment, is the wrath of Almighty God poured out on those who've rebelled and rejected against him.

Now speaking of the prophets, you go to the book of Joel, you'll discover in chapter 2 that the day of the Lord, that the sun will go dark and the moon will go red. Isn't it funny that that whole fad of the blood moons has just passed us by, has it not? You know why? Because the times and the seasons aren't for the body of Christ. They're for those "last days." And Joel lived hundreds of years before the Babylonian captivity. He said, "Oh, there's a day coming." Oftentimes people say, oh, that was metaphor, that was allegory for the Babylonian captivity. If that's the case, then why did Malachi and Zephaniah, who were much later than the Babylonian captivity, why did they talk about the day of the Lord? Why did they speak of this time of judgment, this time of destruction? It's called great. It's called terrible. I mean, there's a lot of adjectives the Bible uses, but one thing we can conclude today is if you are the benefactor of the day of the Lord, it is not a pleasant experience. But the day of the Lord is not for the "ye," it's for the "they." What's the picture? Sudden destruction. Wrath. Judgment. In fact, if I could give you the best picture for what we know as this time period, it'd be the book of Revelation 6 through 19. Jesus referred to it as the great tribulation, but you've got judgment from above, you've got judgment from below, you have humanity dying by the millions or even the billions in today's context, you have death, you have destruction, and you have chaos everywhere. That's the picture of the day of the Lord. The sun looks different, the moon looks different, and there's destruction everywhere.

It's interesting, prophetically speaking, how the Bible describes this time, that the day of the Lord, listen to this in verse 2, comes as a thief in the night. Now last time I checked, and you may have had a unique experience, but last time I checked, whomever desires to take from you a thief does not leave you a text message, an email, or a note on the door saying, "By the way, tomorrow while you're at work, I'm coming to take all the good stuff." What happens? As we're going to discuss in a moment, when they say peace and safety just going about their everyday lives and all of a sudden, that which was precious has been removed, i.e. chapter 4. Here's what's interesting about thieves. Last time I checked, and you may have had a different experience, I don't know of many thieves, whether it be cyber security theft of today, and whether it be automobile, home, I don't know of any thieves that leave whatever they entered better than when they arrived. In fact, there is confusion, there is chaos, there is damage, and there's destruction, but more than anything, there is no warning.

So in this passage in 1 Thessalonians 5, it is speaking of the wrath of God, the judgment of God, all these things that we don't have the ability to say, "Well that's going to happen

in 22 days and 5 hours. That's going to happen at this month of this year." It says, no, as a thief in the night. So why, why is this so important for you and I to study? Particularly for the "ye" versus the "they"? Can I call your attention back to chapter 4, verse 18?

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words." I don't know about you, but what I've just described as the day of the Lord, I don't find that comforting at all. Now don't get me wrong. The Bible says in John 16:33 and other passages that as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, there will be days where we experience trials, tribulations, and persecutions and such. In fact, the early church in the first 300 years had 10 major waves, listen to this, of state-sponsored persecution of what we know as the church. Even this very day, there are men and women, boys and girls, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ all over planet earth, who this day, unlike most of us, did not attend a worship service where they felt safe and secure, but much the opposite. There is economic persecution, political persecution, and yes, unfortunately, there is martyrdom and loss of life.

But none of those things compare to the day of the Lord and here's why. When you and I face persecution or martyrdom for our faith, we are experiencing the wrath of another human. We're experiencing the wrath of humanity as a whole. The day of the Lord is the wrath of Almighty God on his created order that has rejected him, and last time I checked, that Great Commission that the college students spoke of from Matthew 28, you know what he ends that passage with? "Lo, I am with you to the end of the age." What we discover is that those of us who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we can comfort ourselves knowing there's a day we're being caught up with him, but also knowing this, we may experience tribulation, we may experience persecution, we may even experience martyrdom, but we don't have to experience the day of the Lord. That is a blessing that you cannot fathom.

So what's the picture? The "they." What does it say in verse 3? They shall say, peace and safety and then as a thief, sudden destruction comes upon them. Can I share with you humanity's incredible record with peace and safety? A hundred years ago, we fought a war called the war to end all wars. We even established the League of Nations to make sure it never happened again. Within 30 years, we had what we call World War II. Obviously not learning from history, we just changed the name to the United Nations and since then, 70 years after the fact, we've had more wars than we can count. And what do we hear time and time again? All the pundits, all the power brokers, saying if you'll just give this up, we'll bring safety. If you'll just change your behavior, we'll bring you peace. And yet you and I know right now when you look at the news, we are knocking on the door of World War III, and what do the pundits say? Oh, there's peace, there's safety. In fact, time eludes me this morning but the picture that you get in scripture regarding the day of the Lord is there is an entity who will arrive on the scene one day, we collectively call him the Antichrist. Can I tell you what the world's going to call him? Can I tell you what the children of darkness are going to call him? They're going to call him Messiah. He'll bring the peace they've always wanted. He'll bring the safety. It's going to be one big worldwide kumbaya around the campfire time.

What does it say? When they say peace and safety, what's the next phrase? Sudden destruction comes upon them. So how is this prophetic? I want you to notice the end of

verse 3, they shall not escape. You know, any time we speak of the Second Coming, any time we speak of these events that formerly in theology we would call eschatology, we discover there are actually more prophecies in the Bible about the Second Coming of Jesus than his First Coming and yet here's the irony: there is not a one of us who would allegorize or make a metaphor those First Coming prophecies. Allow me to illustrate. We never sing, oh little town that was smaller than the other towns around him at Christmas. What do we sing? Oh little town of Bethlehem, because do you know what Micah said? He would be born in Bethlehem. When it comes to that famous resurrection season or "Easter season," we don't have churches do Passion plays with a variety of means of which Jesus died because we just don't know how he died. What does the Bible say? That he would be pierced in his hands and his feet. And when we gather here on the first day or what we call the "Lord's day," the reason we do so is because the Bible doesn't say, oh this Messiah, this Jesus will do something great. What does it say in Psalm 16? He's going to raise from the dead. And the reason that I allude to that in closing is this: we take the First Coming prophecies literally because humanity saw them fulfilled literally, so why would we take these allegorically? Why would we take them metaphorically? Why would we take them just as illusion and imagery? And I'm going to tell you why: because we don't like what they say. We want to live the life we want to live. We want to do the things we want to do. We want to thumb our nose at God and say, "I'll do what I want to do." And guess what? He says, "Fine. There's coming a day like a thief in the night that for those of you that have rejected, for those of you that rebel, sudden destruction and you will not escape it."

Let me close with this: there's only one way to escape it, is that's to go from one of the "they" to one of the "ye." To go from one of those who's rejected Jesus to one of those who has believed him. To go from one of those who said, "I don't need you, God," to one of those who says, "I can't do it without you God." The only means of escape is Jesus Christ alone.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. Today as we come to this time in our service, you may be gathered here in person, you may be online, you may be listening on the radio, and maybe today's that day where the Spirit of God took the word of God and made it very clear that if this "day" were to occur, you'd be a "they" and not a "ye." The Bible makes it really clear that we've all sinned and fallen short of his glory, but that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. In Romans 10, it says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Can I share with you clearly what that doesn't say? It doesn't say whoever becomes a Baptist. It doesn't say whoever joins a church. It doesn't say whoever starts this or stops that. It just says whoever calls upon the Lord, believing as the previous verses say, that they have a sin condition that only Jesus can solve. If you're here today, this morning, maybe you're one of those individuals, maybe you're here in person, maybe you're online, you've never had that time in your life where you've been taken out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, you've never had that time where you've been forgiven of your sin and saved of your sinful state. Today would be a great time. It's not about the specific words that you or I or anybody else uses. It's not about taking phrases and repeating them as somebody else has led. The Bible says it's the cry of the heart. Maybe today your heart's cry would go a little something like this.

"God today, I recognize I've got a sin condition. God, I have rebelled against you. I have rejected you. I've tried to do it according to my way or somebody else that's not your way, and I understand that your word says the wages or the result of my sin is death. But it also says but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. So God today, I believe. I believe I've got a sin problem that only Jesus can fix. God today, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he came on my behalf. I believe he lived a sinless life on my behalf. God today, I believe that when Jesus Christ was nailed to his cross, he was bearing the price, the punishment and the pain of my sin. But God, I also believe that three days later when he rose from the grave, it wasn't just victory over death, He made it possible to have victory over my sin and my eternity. So God today, I recognize I've got a sin condition only Jesus can fix. I don't know how to solve all the other problems in this world. I don't know how to address all the turmoil. But this one thing I know is that Jesus Christ is the only one who can forgive me of my sins and save my soul. So the best way I know how, I'm asking you to do just that, to forgive me and to save me. In the best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed, our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today for the very first time you cried out for Jesus to save you. In a moment I'm going to pray for us. We're going to stand and sing together. I just want to invite you just to step out and step forward. We have a room set aside, a team set aside, just to hear your story, to encourage you, to pray with you and to pray for you. Maybe today you say, "Pastor, I've been a believer for years," but maybe you're like those on our campus today that will follow in believer's baptism, or maybe you've never publicly expressed that, we'd love to have that conversation. Or maybe you're like those each and every week who come and say, "This is our spiritual home. This is our body of faith. This is our church." We'd love to have that conversation. Or maybe today you say, "I just need to be prayed with. I just need to be prayed for. I just need to be prayed over." The invitation is open to any and all.

Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of response, God, thank you particularly in light of what we've read today that at this moment and at this time, you have given us the opportunity to be saved from our sins, that we don't have to experience your wrath, we don't have to experience all those horrific descriptions that we find in the Bible. So God, I pray today that your Holy Spirit will show us clearly, will convict us of our sin, of the righteousness of Jesus and the judgment that is to come and that we would simply respond to you the way you've called us to today. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.