

Last week we considered 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 where Paul encouraged us by reminding us what is going to happen when Christ comes again. Today we continue in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 where Paul encourages us to use that knowledge to keep ourselves prepared for Christ's coming.

*"5 Concerning the times and dates, brothers, there is no need to write to you, 2 for you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 When people are saying, "Peace and security," destruction will suddenly come on them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will certainly not escape. 4 But you, brothers, are not in the dark so that this day takes you by surprise like a thief, 5 for you are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness. 6 So then let us not sleep like everyone else, but rather let us remain alert and sober. 7 To be sure, those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 9 You see, God did not appoint us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10 He died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11 Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as you are also doing."*

### **Dear Fellow Redeemed,**

Early warning signals can save lives. I think it was about 20 years ago when I first noticed it. Our family went to an ocean beach and they had installed Tsunami sirens. Now they are quite common all up and down the coast. With the warning system, people will know when a Tsunami is coming and they can clear off the beach and get to higher ground before it hits. Without the warning, people on the beach have no idea what is coming and by the time they see the waves it is too late and they are swept away.

God also has an early warning system meant to save lives. It's right here in our text and our Scripture readings and many other passages in the Bible. Like the Thessalonians all of you "know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." Jesus says He will come at a time when no one expects it. That is why Paul says, "You, brothers, are not in the dark so that this day takes you by surprise like a thief." Since we know it is coming we should take the appropriate action. That is God's message to us this morning.

### **You Know What's Coming – Seek Higher Ground!**

**-I-**

First of all Paul warns us what NOT to do. **Don't go to sleep!** Paul says, "You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness. 6 So then let us not sleep like everyone else, but rather let us remain alert and sober." Can you imagine being on an ocean beach and the Tsunami siren goes off and you just ignored it and continued playing in the sand and water? How foolish would that be? That is the kind of action that Paul describes as being asleep. It's like you are asleep, totally oblivious to what is happening.

Did you notice Paul said, "Let us not sleep LIKE EVERYONE ELSE." The rest of the world ignores the warning. Most people know the Bible talks about Jesus' coming again for a Day of Judgment. But they don't pay any attention. They laugh it off as a ridiculous idea. Paul describes their reaction, "When people are saying, "Peace and security," destruction will suddenly come on them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will certainly not escape." It's rather ironic; the people of the world do talk about various disasters that could destroy life in this world as we know it. On the news the other day they were talking about Kim

Jong-un's latest missile test, saying he has missiles that could reach North America, raising the scare again of a nuclear holocaust. Global warming could get to such an extreme that life as we know it will not be able to continue. A giant meteor could crash into the earth destroying life. But when God's word warns that Jesus will come, not could come but will come to judge the living and dead, they laugh that off and say at least we don't have to worry about that. So they are saying, "Peace and Security." As far as God's judgement goes, there is nothing to fear. They are asleep spiritually and oblivious to what is coming. Jesus says it will be just like in the days of Noah. Everyone will be going about life as usual and then sudden destruction comes upon them and they will not escape. That sounds pretty frightening, doesn't it? It's meant to be. This is a serious warning.

When Paul says, "So then let us not sleep like everyone else," He is pointing out a dangerous snare. People all around us live their lives enjoying the moment, unaware of what is coming. They live their lives for themselves to get the most enjoyment out of life. Since since people all around us are living like that, it is very easy for us to be caught up in that way of living. It appeals to our sinful flesh and before you know it we can be lulled to sleep spiritually, living for ourselves and whatever pleasure we can get out of life. Jesus told several parables about the dreadfulness of not doing what our Master asked us to do while He is away and then being caught by surprise when Jesus comes. So don't sleep but "remain alert and sober."

**You Know What's Coming –  
Seek Higher Ground!**

**-II-**

That higher ground of safety and protection is Christ. Paul tells us in the next verse, "Since we belong to the day," that is since we know what is coming, take the appropriate action. He says, "Let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet." If you want to make sure you are ready, put on three things: Faith, Love and Hope. They are all found in Christ.

**Faith** is the only thing that makes us ready for Christ's return. Faith is knowing that we are sinners who are separated from God and under His wrath. It knows that we can't possibly save ourselves. Faith also knows that Christ "died for us." He bore the wrath and punishment of God in our place, "so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him."

The Holy Spirit has already given us this faith. Now Paul tells us to put on faith. We need to continue to feed and nurture our faith. Jesus' brother Jude put it this way in our Epistle Reading: "But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit." Jude 1:20 We build ourselves up in our most holy faith by continuing in God's word, for "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." Rom. 10:17 Faith is fueled by God's love in the Gospel. The Apostle John says, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." 1 John 4:18 When we live in faith in Christ, we are secure in God's perfect love. That is the higher ground and we know we are safe and don't need to fear His judgment. We are safe because God promises, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9 And that is what faith does, it confesses our sins in repentance.

To put on faith is to do as Paul said to the Colossians, "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." Col. 3:1-4

Faith and love go hand in hand. You can't have one without the other. That is why Paul

mentions them together. Put on faith and love as a breastplate. Faith is in the heart and can only be seen and known by God. Love is the outward action which demonstrates our faith. Faith shows itself in love. God is love, and when we receive God's great love by faith, then we will love also. That love is first of all a love for God. "We love Him because He first loved us." That love for God naturally does what God wants. "If you love me, keep my commandments," Jesus said. Love for God desires to worship God. God reminds us through the prophet Isaiah, however, that worship is not just sitting here in church. Worship involves our heart and life.

God said about the people of Israel, "They seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways, ... They take delight in approaching God." Is. 58:2 That sounds really good, but God rebuked them because their worship was only outward. But they were puzzled and said, "Why have we fasted... and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?" vs. 3 Then God answers "In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?" vs. 4-5

They were worshipping all right, but they weren't really worshipping God. They were going through the motions of worship because it made them feel good about themselves, but their lives were anything but lives of faith and love. They worshiped God on the sabbath and disregarded God's commands the rest of the week. God explains, worship is not just bowing the head like a bulrush bent in the wind, and spreading out sackcloth and ashes. It's not just going through the motions, true worship comes from a heart of faith and love for God. It is delighting in His word and praising Him for His mercy and grace.

Love for God also shows itself in love to others. God continues, "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?" vs. 6-7 You see works of love and kindness especially to the poor and needy and to our enemies, those are all acts of faith and worship. Loving family and friends is not necessarily a sign of faith. As Jesus said, "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?" Matt. 5:46-47

The Apostle Jude showed another important way to show love, "Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." And then he explains how to do that, "Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh." Jude 1:21-23. When you know the people around you at work or school are oblivious to what is coming; that they are unprepared for Christ's return and will face sudden destruction, the loving thing to do is to try to rescue them. Snatch them out of the fire, by warning them and showing them that our only safety and protection is found in Jesus' death and resurrection.

Putting on faith and love in these genuine ways, is like a warrior putting on his breastplate. When we keep God and doing His will foremost in our mind and heart and when we are constantly thinking about how to rescue others in the world, we will not be misled to follow the ways of the world and doze off to sleep spiritually. The Holy Spirit will keep us awake and sober. As Jude says, He is the only one "who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy." 1:24

When we nurture the faith and love in our heart, that is also how to put on “the hope of salvation as a helmet.” When we remember that heaven is our goal, we will not get side tracked by all the pleasures of the world. When we keep our heart and mind fixed on God and the treasures of heaven, then we have a whole different outlook on life. With our focus on our Savior and put Him first in our life, then we recognize the things of this life as gifts from God that we can enjoy in accord with His will.

Finally Paul gives us a wonderful word of encouragement. “You see, God did not appoint us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as you are also doing.” vs. 9-11 What a wonderful, joyful word. God has appointed you for obtaining salvation through Jesus. He chose you already in eternity before He created the world. He brought you to faith in Christ to receive salvation. He is also the one who keeps you in the faith, as Jude said. We “are not in the dark so that this day takes you by surprise like a thief.” Simply walk in the path that He has laid out for you and you will be perfectly safe on the higher ground of Christ. From there we can welcome what is coming with great joy and anticipation. We will be ready to receive our Savior with Joy when He comes.

Amen