

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

"Living in Light of the Day of the Lord"

Sermon

NAS text

Tim Black

1.

Introduction

1.

What would you do if you knew you were to die tomorrow? What would you do if you knew Christ would return tomorrow? How would you live? If you knew that Christ was coming back tomorrow, would you spend your retirement fund, and go do all the things you've always wanted to do but never had the time for? Would you quit your job and go on a vacation? Or would you go on a mountaintop to wait for his return, as some people in fact have done? Perhaps you would begin doing all of the activities which you have thought only "super-spiritual" people do, that only the most godly members of the congregation do, and spend as much time as you can in prayer, in fasting, in giving your time to those in need? If you knew the day of Christ's return was tomorrow, how would you live? How would you live, in light of the day of the Lord ?

2.

Isn't it curious that we often want to ask these questions? What makes this kind of question so interesting to us? One reason they are a curiosity to us is that in fact we do **not** know when Christ will return. We never will know that tomorrow is the day when He will return. But we're also curious because we know that on that day, great changes will take place in our lives, in our experience, as well as in the lives of believers and unbelievers throughout the world. In truth, on that day the whole universe will change, and it will never be the same again. So how should we get ready for that change? Should we live differently than we do now? Or should we continue on in the lifestyle we

already live? There are so many questions. So many questions, but does God give us any answers?

3.

Well, yes, He certainly does. In today's passage He tells us about the day of the Lord, about the day when Christ will return. He tells us some of what will happen on that day, so that we will know how to be ready for it. He tells us how to live in light of the day of the Lord.

4.

In **1 Thess. 5:1-3**, God tells us three things about the Day of the Lord, and especially, He tells us what that day will be like for unbelievers. Both believers and unbelievers alike will experience that day, but while it will be a day of perfect joy and gladness for believers, it will be a day of perfect terror and mourning for the unbeliever. For the unbeliever especially, the day of the Lord will come at a

secret time, it will be a **surprise threat**, and it will bring on them a **sudden trauma**. 1

Thess. 5:1-3 teaches us these 3 things about the Day of the Lord – its **secret time**

, **surprise threat**

, and **sudden trauma**

. The first point is in

v. 1

, the second in

v. 2

, the third in

v. 3

.

1.

Body

1.

Secret time – you want to know (1)

1.

First, the Day of the Lord will come at a secret time. Paul reminds us of this in **v. 1**, saying

1.

Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you.

2.

Now some commentators say that Paul is exaggerating a bit here when he says that he does not need to write to you. They think that he is using a figure of speech, by saying he doesn't need to write to you, but then he writes to you anyway. But let me suggest to you that Paul is not using *this* kind of figure of speech here, because he is repeating a pattern of speaking which he has already used in the book in the immediate context, in **4:9-10**. In this pattern of speaking (which builds on his general faith-love-hope pattern which structures much of the outline of the book) Paul first mentions something about which Paul truly does NOT need to teach his readers, because they already know what they need to know (faith), and they have already begun to do what they ought to do (love). But where their need lies is in the continuation, in the further development, of what has already begun in their lives by God's grace. Upon the foundation of their faith and love must be built the certain

superstructure of their enduring hope. You remember that we saw Paul speak this way before, in

4:9-10

, where he said,

1.

9 Now as to the love of the brethren, **you have no need for anyone to write to you**, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; 10 for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to **excel still more**

,

2.

Here Paul uses precisely the same language as he uses in **5:1** -

-"

You have no need for anyone to write to you.

" And here Paul is recalling to our minds what he said in

4:1

,

1.

Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you **excel still more** .

2.

You see, in the whole book of 1 Thessalonians, Paul is saying basically this: look how far you have come! Look how far the Lord has brought you! He has given you a working faith. And through the exercise of that faith He has begun to give you a laboring love, and because of this working faith and laboring love, you now have the beginnings of your enduring hope, your hope that will endure unto the end. If you have a working faith and a laboring love, then you will have an enduring hope. So just as you have love for the brethren already, so now you should excel still more. You don't need to be taught how to *begin* to love, no, rather now you need to be taught about how to continue in love. How to endure in love.

You need a love that loves with an enduring hope for this life and the next. It is precisely this sort of thing that Paul is saying here in

1 Thess. 5:1

. You already know the basic fact that the coming of the Lord will be at a secret time, Paul is saying. You know you can't know the day or the hour. I don't need to write to you about that. No, but what I do need to write to you is about how to live in light of the fact that Christ's return will be at a secret time. You need to know the way in which the secret time of Christ's coming impacts your life today. And this impact he will immediately begin to explain in the next verse.

3.

But you tell me, does everyone who reads Paul's clear words here believe them? Do you believe that you really don't need to know the secret time of Christ's return? Are you tempted to try to find out the day or the hour of His coming? You and I will be tempted to try to discover this date until that date arrives. Now why do you think that is?

4.

It is because of this. If you can find out Christ's estimated time of arrival, if you can find out the day or the hour, then you don't need to repent of your sins today. If Christ is coming next week, I can do whatever I want today, and repent of my sins right before Christ comes back. If Christ is coming *later*, I can do whatever I want *now*. Oh, you say that Christ is coming back on my 80th

birthday? Then I can sin to my heart's content today! Oh, wait, you miscalculated? Ok, then now you say he's coming back next week? Great! Now I can quit my job and take that vacation I've always wanted! Do you see how knowing the day or the hour of the Lord could encourage us to sin? To give up our daily responsibilities, and feel justified in doing so? This is the kind of bad effect that speculating about the day and the hour will have on you.

5.

Christ said in **Rev. 22:6** “Behold, I am coming soon.” We

expect Christ to come at any moment; He could come today! But there are some people today who claim that because Christ will come again very soon, He no longer requires us to remain members of His church. They believe that because Christ is coming soon, God has changed His way of dealing with His people, so that God has rejected the institutional church, and we must leave the church. But now you tell me, insofar as this speculation that God has rejected His church is rooted in speculation about the day and the hour of Christ’s return, is this speculation not bound to fail? Christ tells us

very clearly
in

Matt. 24:36

that

“of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son,

but the Father alone.”

Of that day and hour
no one knows.

Not Harold Camping, not you, not me.
Not even Jesus Christ while He was on
earth. No man will know the day or the
hour of Christ's return, until He in fact
appears, then and only then will you
know that the day of the Lord has
arrived.

Matthew 24:23-28
says this, saying

1.

23 “Then if anyone says to
you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or

'There He is,' do not believe him. 24
"For false Christs and false
prophets will arise and will show great
signs and wonders, so as to
mislead, if possible, even the elect. 25
"Behold, I have told you in
advance. 26 "So if they say
to you, 'Behold, He is in the
wilderness,' do not go out, or,
'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do
not believe them. 27 "For just
as the lightning comes from the east
and flashes even to the west, so
will the coming of the Son of Man be.
28 "Wherever the corpse is,
there the vultures will gather.

2.

The coming of the Lord will be so great an event, so grand, so unmistakable, that while the time of His arrival was completely secret before He comes, it will be completely unmistakable when He arrives. Matthew goes on in **v. 29**, saying that

1.

Matthew 24:29-31 29 "But immediately after the tribulation

of those days THE the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the son of man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. 31 "And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

2.

They will see the Son of man coming on the clouds. You will see Him. If you don't see Him, the day has not yet arrived, because He has not yet arrived.

If you do see him, then that means He has arrived. Is this not a very simple point? And in fact it is confirmed in **Revelation 1:7**, which says “

every eye will see Him.

”

3.

Why then do we want to find
some other indicator of the time
of His arrival? Why do we
look for something *other than*
Him?! Are

we not looking for
Christ Himself
to return? Is
He

not the culmination and
consummation of all our joys,
all our hopes, all our desire to
see

God glorified

and enjoyed forever? When
Christ our Savior appears, will it
not be our greatest joy to see
Him

, to know that now we may
continue on in perfected
fellowship with
Him

unto all eternity? But out of
the sinfulness of our hearts we

desire to look into His secret counsel, to have a special privilege not even given to Christ Himself while He was a man on earth! Out of our sinfulness, we sinfully desire to reject some blessing of God in this life, some discipline of suffering under which He has appointed us to pass in this life, some responsibility He has given us to carry out in this life. Whether it is the fellowship of the church which we desire to reject, or mutual submission to

fellow believers, or the discipline and edifying exhortations of the pastors and teachers in Christ's church, our hearts desire to know the time of Christ's return, so that we may neglect our duties. Is this not what Christ warned against in

Matthew 24

? It is.

Matth. 24:45

reads,

1.

Matthew 24:45-51 45

"Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? 46

" **Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.**

47 "Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 48

"

But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,' 49 and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; 50 the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know,

51 and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place

there will be weeping and
gnashing of teeth.

2.

How dare we abuse any of
our responsibilities, or neglect
them, because we think we
know when Christ will return.
You have no need for me to
write to you to tell you the
time and the epochs of

Christ's return, beloved brethren, because Christ will come on a day when you do not expect Him, and at an hour which you do not know.

3.

Surprise Threat – you want to protect, guard (2)

1.

And therefore the day will be a surprise. For the unbeliever, the day will be a surprise threat. Paul says this in **1 Thess. 5:2**,

1.

1 Thessalonians 5:2 **2**
For you yourselves know full

well that the day of the Lord
will come just like a thief in
the night.

2.

The day will come like a
thief in the night. It will
come as a surprise to the
unbeliever. He had no idea

the Lord would come to judge the world! He had no idea that the end was so near! And now he cannot escape! The day is here, the Lord now will judge the sheep and the goats, sending some to eternal life, and the rest to their deserved eternal damnation. “Oh, why was I so unprepared!” ...the unbeliever will cry. “If only

I had known Christ would come.” But He will come as a thief in the night.

3.

Now what do you want to do when you know that there are thieves prowling around in your neighborhood at night? Don't you want to lock

the door? Don't you want to **protect** yourself, your family, your house? You want to **guard** against the crimes the thieves seek to perpetrate against you. This is the feeling unbelievers have when they sense the wrath of God revealed against all their ungodliness and unrighteousness, when they live in fear of death

all their lives, and face the fearful expectation of judgment. They constantly are on the run, worrying that they will be caught for their sins. They seek to hide in the darkness, to protect themselves against the judgment to come.

4.

But can they protect themselves? No. The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. The day will be a **surprise threat** to them, and there will be no protection to be found, for an unbeliever.

5.

But you are not an unbeliever, if you have believed on Jesus Christ for your salvation. If you have trusted that in His death, He died in your place, to take the wrath of God for your sins. If you trust on His resurrection, that in it He truly conquered death, and now is alive forevermore, to apply that victory to you

in your own experience even now as well. You know that the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is now at work in your mortal bodies, that the Spirit and God's love has been poured out in your heart, giving you the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness,

self-control. And so you are not of the night; you do not have to hide from Christ when He returns. You do not have to fear Christ as if He is a thief. No, He is your Savior, who loves you, who gave His life for you that you should live, and His perfect love casts out all your fear of that day. Paul says this in **vv. 4-6**, saying

1.

4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; 5 for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; 6 so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.

2.

You need not live in fear of that day, but rather you are at home in its light. You long for the courts of heaven, where God and the Lamb are its light, where the glory

of God shines in a grand eternal display, without spot, or wrinkle, without shadows and darkness.

And so you long as well to live in that holy communion with God in heaven; and to be holy as He is holy. You do not desire to sleep as the others do, in their sins, in their debauchery, in the

drunkenness and evil revelry into which unbelievers throw themselves. No, rather, because you have been given the foundational gifts of faith, love, and hope, now you long for God to give you even more of *these* things, you long to excel still more in them! You “pray for

perfection,” as

1 Thess. 3:12-13

exhorts us to do, eagerly desiring to have more faith, more love, more hope abounding to the end, so that God will finally perfect this work of sanctifying you on the day of Christ's return.

Paul prayed in

3:12-13

,

1.

12 and may the Lord
cause you to increase
and abound in love for
one another, and for all
people, just as we also do
for you; 13 so that He
may establish your hearts

without blame in holiness
before our God and
Father at the coming of
our Lord Jesus with all
His saints.

2.

The day of the Lord

will come on the unbeliever as a surprise threat, but for you, the day will be an expected, and longed for, and strived for, completion of God's sanctifying work in you.

3.

Sudden Trauma – you want to flee! (3)

1.

So how then will you live in light of the day of the Lord? Let me show you Paul's final

answer in this passage
to our questions about
that day. For the
unbeliever, the day will
bring a sudden
trauma. **A sudden
trauma**, from
which you and they will
want to flee with all
your might. Paul says,

1.

1 **Thessalonians 5:3**

3 While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.

2.

Just as labor pains
come on a woman
suddenly, at a time
you cannot predict,
so will the wrath of
God come on the sons

of disobedience
when Christ returns. I
tell you the truth, just
as the pain of
childbirth is great and
terrible, so the pain
and destruction
which will come on
unbelievers will be
great. It will be a
trauma, a **sudden**

trauma

.

3.

It will be an **inescapable trauma**

. Paul says, “
and they will not
escape.

” Oh, they will want to

escape, they will wish and long and cry out for a way to be free from that pain and torment, but once the judgment day arrives, there will be no chance for them to repent. They will not escape.

4.

Now let me ask you again, how will you live in light of the day of the Lord? Do you recognize the great terror this day will be to you if you

do not repent of your
sins, and believe on
the Lord Jesus
Christ for salvation?
Christ calls you today
to believe that he
died and rose from
the dead, to give you
eternal life, to give
you a working faith,

a laboring love, and
an enduring hope. If
you believe on the
Lord Jesus Christ,
you will be saved. If
you do not, then
destruction will come
upon you suddenly
like labor pains on a
woman with child,

and you will not
escape.

5.

The conclusion to
which you must come
is this: You cannot
know the day or the

hour when Christ will return. But what you can and must do is believe on Him for salvation, and then you will escape from the coming wrath. This is what it means to have a working faith. But

not only will you
believe on Christ, you
also will do what He
commands. Christ
told you that “if you
love me, you will do
what I command.” Do
you live a life of love
toward God?
Toward your

neighbors? Toward
the unbelievers
around you? If so
then you will be ready
for that day when
Christ returns. Jesus
said this in **Matt.**
24:45-47

,

1.

45 “Who then
is the faithful and
sensible slave whom
his master put in
charge of his
household to give
them their food at the

proper time? 46
“Blessed is that
slave whom his
master finds so
doing when he
comes. 47
“Truly I say to
you that he will put
him in charge of all
his possessions.

2.

You must live a life of faithfulness to God's commands, a life of growing holiness. In this

way, and in this way alone, will you truly be prepared for the day of Christ's return. You must have a laboring love.

3.

Lastly, you must grow in your hope for that day. You must have an enduring hope. Paul exhorts us in 1

Thessalonians

5:8-11

1.

8 But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of

salvation. 9 For
God has not
destined us for
wrath, but for
obtaining salvation
through our Lord
Jesus Christ, 10
who died for us,
so that whether we

are awake or
asleep, we will live
together with Him.

11 Therefore
encourage one
another and build
up one another,
just as you also are
doing.

2.

Because you
have put on the
breastplate of faith
and love, and put

on the helmet of
salvation, then you
must continue to
grow in their
exercise, in their
use, in your growth
in holiness. Live
as sober men,
knowing that

Christ will return,
not trying to find
out the day and
the hour in order to
connive your way
through life, or to
avoid your
responsibilities,
but rather living

holy lives so that
when Christ
returns, He will
find you faithfully
living according
to His commands.

3.

In the end, this is what you need to know about that day – that you must live a holy life today, so that in the end God will in fact establish your hearts

blameless in
holiness at the
coming of our
Lord Jesus Christ
with all His saints.

4.

That's how to be
ready for Christ's
return.

5.

That's how you
should live in light

of the Day of the Lord.