

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 — Are You Ready For The End Of The World?

May 5, 2024

Good morning, CrossWinds! This morning, we continue our studies in 1 Thessalonians. We are in an interesting portion of the book. Last week, we were in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, which talks about the return of Jesus for Christians, sometimes called the rapture. We learned a lot last week about the great hope we get to look forward to as Christians. When Jesus returns, every Christian from all eternity will get their bodies back. They will get new bodies that are similar to our old bodies. We will be like we are today, but our new bodies will also differ. They will be just like Jesus' resurrection body. We will look like we look today, but our bodies will never get sick. They will never die. Our bodies will be known for their strength, not their weakness.

Even better than our resurrection bodies will have a great reunion we will have with our loved ones who died in Jesus. Husbands, you will get a chance to hold your wife's hand again. You will hear her voice again. You will be able to look into her eyes again. Mom and Dad, who lost that baby or who lost that teenager who knew Jesus, you will be able to hug and hold your son or daughter in the flesh again. There may be literal tears coming from the eyes of our resurrected body on that day, but they will not be tears of sadness. They will be tears of joy and gratitude to Jesus. He saved us. He resurrected us. Instead of an eternity of just punishment, he showered us with forgiveness and grace we do not deserve. We will have tears of joy and gratitude to him on that day. Oh, what a great and glorious day the return of Jesus for Christians will be!

This morning, we continue our studies on the return of Christ. We are in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. In this passage, we are looking at a different return of Jesus. This passage is not about the return of Jesus to save His people and resurrect their bodies. This passage is about the return of Jesus to judge sin and sinners on this earth. It is the end of the world as we know it. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 was about Jesus as the savior of his people. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 is about Jesus as the judge.

Depending on your views of the end times, Jesus may return as a judge at the same time he returns as a savior, or those two occurrences will be separated by a thousand years. I am not here to iron out the specifics on that timeline. Our passage doesn't do that. It only tells us that for Christians, Jesus will return as our savior who will give us resurrection bodies, but for everyone else, he will return as the judge.

Early in the letter, Paul hinted this topic of God's wrath was coming.

...and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 (ESV)

Jesus is not just our savior who will save us from the coming wrath, but he is also the one who will eventually carry out the coming wrath. The term *wrath* is used in the introduction to the book, in chapter 1. We don't hear about wrath again until the passage we will study this morning, where the same word is used.

For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Thessalonians 5:9 (ESV)

Both 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, deal with the return of Christ. The primary concern last week was living Christians were concerned their deceased Christian relatives would be stuck in heaven and miss

the awesome experience of Jesus returning to rescue his people and the resurrection of their bodies. Paul said, don't worry about that. The dead in Christ will rise first. Today, the concern in this passage is about living Christians. What will happen to them when Jesus returns not as the savior but as the judge? Will living Christians escape Jesus' wrath against sin?

I am sure the Thessalonians were no different from us. Many in the church trusted in Jesus to be saved, but as life passed, some fell back into sin. They made choices about which they were ashamed. Before Christ, they didn't know better. Now that they trusted in Christ, they knew better. Sometimes, they choose to sin anyway. Of course, they asked Jesus to forgive them, but they had lingering regrets. They struggled to forgive themselves, especially after returning to the same old sins many times. When Jesus returns to deal with sin, would he deal with my sin? Yes, I am saved by Jesus, but when he returns, I have gone back to the same old sins so many times. When he comes back to deal with sin, he is going to deal with me? That is the question in these verses.

Let me tell you how these verses end before we build up too much anxiety over this question. The final verses of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 ended up with words of comfort for Christians about their deceased loved ones.

Therefore encourage one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:18 (ESV)

The final verse of this section also ends up in comfort. As we get into the topic of God's wrath against sin and our repeated dives into sin, even when we know better, know there is good news coming.

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (ESV)

Let's read the text and then study it together.

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 (ESV)

This paragraph has a unique outline.

- Verses 1-3 — These deal with the timing of the return of Jesus for judgment.
- Verses 4-5 — These verses give the first reason why Christians don't need to worry about this day.
- Verses 6-8 — Instead of launching into a second reason, Paul gives some brief application about how Christians should live differently because we don't need to worry about Jesus returning in wrath for us.
- Verses 9-10 — They give the second reason why Christians don't need to worry about Jesus returning in wrath for them.
- Verse 11 — Paul concludes by reminding the Thessalonians to encourage one another with these words.

How will the world end?

The end of the world is a popular topic. On the news, we hear the world will implode in ten years from global warming. Everybody wants a road map

about how and when the end-of-the-world will unfold. It is a, popular topic in literature. In 1970 Hal Linsey published a book titled, The Late Great Planet Earth. It sold over a million copies. My favorite goofy book on this topic was written by Edgar Whisenant. He was a man with no theological training and he also didn't attend a church. He wrote a really bad book about the end of the world, but it had a catchy title, so it sold a lot of copies. It was, 88 Reasons Why The Rapture Will Occur in 1988. He sold 4.5 million copies. Obviously, he was completely wrong. Since he made so much money on the first book, in spite of being wrong, he tried a sequel the next year titled, The Final Shout: Rapture Report 1989. Sales of that piece of literature were poor for obvious reasons. A popular book series in my generation is the Left Behind series. It sold 65 million copies.

When will Jesus return in judgment? Are there signs that tell us the end of the world is near? That is where we will begin. Instead of starting in verse 1, let's begin in verse 2.

For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 1 Thessalonians 5:2 (ESV)

In the Bible, the return of Jesus, not in salvation, but to judge sin, is known as the day of the Lord. This is not a topic pastors typically talk about. Today, everything must be positive, affirming, and comforting, so the day of the Lord isn't usually discussed, but the Bible has a lot to say about it.

What is the Day of the Lord?

The Day of the Lord is mentioned four times in the New Testament. It is found in Acts 2:20, this passage, 2 Thessalonians 2:2, and 2 Peter 3:10. While it

is only directly mentioned four times in the New Testament, it is mentioned many more times in the Old Testament.

The way it is usually brought up is that an Old Testament prophet would speak about God's temporal judgment, either on God's people for their sins or on another nation. After talking about God's temporal judgment on sin in their time, they would prophetically lift their eyes up and speak about God's ultimate judgment on sin at the end of time, called the day of the Lord. Let's read some passages that talk about this.

Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come! Isaiah 13:6 (ESV)

While prophesying judgment for sin in his time, Isaiah speaks about God's ultimate response to sin at the end of time, the day of the Lord.

Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. Isaiah 13:9 (ESV)

While the day of Jesus' return for Christians, is a day filled with hugs and celebration, the day of the Lord against sin will be terrible. It will desolate the land and destroy sinners on the planet.

That day is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, to avenge himself on his foes. The sword shall devour and be sated and drink its fill of their blood... Jeremiah 46:10 (ESV)

While Jesus returning in salvation for his people is a day of life, Jesus returning in judgment on sin is a day of death.

For the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head. Obadiah 15 (ESV)

Obadiah is a small Old Testament book that speaks about God's judgment on the Edomites for their sin against their relatives, the Israelites. Instead of

taking in Israelite refugees, who were their relatives, when the Babylonians attacked them, they turned Israelites over to the cruelty of the Babylonian invaders. For that, God poured out his wrath on them. As Obadiah prophesies that wrath, he prophetically lifts up his eyes to speak about God's ultimate judgment on sin at the end of time, the day of the Lord. Notice at that time, God will not just judge individuals for their sins, but nations for their sins.

...For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger; for in the fire of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed. Zephaniah 3:8 (ESV)

Zephaniah also speaks of the Day of the Lord as a day when Jesus carried out judgment on nations, not just individuals. He also speaks about it as a day when all the earth shall be consumed. Zephaniah was not prophetically speaking about God's limited temporal judgement on sin, but his ultimate final judgement against all sin.

Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light,.. Amos 5:18 (ESV)

In the days of Amos, there was plenty of corruption. The rich were taking advantage of the poor. Justice was not taking place. Some people were wishing for the day of the Lord. They were praying the day of the Lord would come on the corrupt. Amos gave a corrective on this. He says, "Be careful what you pray for." Do you really want this day? This day is not to be desired. There is no joy in this day. There is no light on this day, only darkness and gloom.

By the time we get to the New Testament, Peter describes the day of the Lord in vivid details, which explains why Amos told the people to be careful about praying this day would come.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. 2 Peter 3:10 (ESV)

With all of these Old Testament texts about the Day of the Lord and the great wrath of Jesus against sin that will be released on this day, it is understandable why there developed a fair amount of anxiety by some Thessalonians Christians about what would happen to them on the day Jesus returned not as the savior, but as the judge. They had the Old Testament as the only background they knew. When God's people in the Old Testament fell into sin, God sent a nation to conquer them. They were God's chosen people, but they still suffered for their sins. As Christians, they were God's chosen people, but like in Old Testament times, when they fell back into sin, would Jesus, therefore, judge them in wrath on the day of his return to deal with sin? This is a purgatory idea. Jesus will save me but surely, since I knew better, I will have to suffer for some of my sins. Let's see what this passage tells us about that important question.

What do I need to know about Jesus' return in judgment?

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. 1 Thessalonians 5:1 (ESV)

Concerning the times and seasons. In Greek, there are two different words for time. Both of them are used here. The word *times*, is the Greek word *chronos*. From this Greek word, we get the word chronograph and chronological. This is calendar times. It is sequential time. It is detailed time measured by days, minutes, seconds, and years. This is the kind of dating we put in a personal planner. The other word in Greek used for time is the word *kairos*. It is translated

in this verse as the word *seasons*. This does not refer to a specific time but to a season of time. For example, have winter time. We know when we have winter and summer time, but because of the variability in the weather, it is hard to pinpoint winter and summer to a specific day. It is a season of time.

The Thessalonians asked Paul about the specific and general times regarding Jesus' return to judge sin. Paul doesn't give the answer they want. He simply tells them they have no need for any more information on this subject. He will not waste his time talking about this in the letter.

Everyone is interested in the details of when Jesus will return in judgment. The disciples were also curious, and Jesus gave them some information.

As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Matthew 24:3 (ESV)

Why does Paul choose not to give them more details about the timing of when this will happen? Here are two practical reasons.

1. If we had a date that was too far away, we would ignore it. If we had a date that was near, we would panic. Isn't that the truth? If we knew Jesus wasn't going to return in judgment for another thousand years, we wouldn't even think about it.

2. Christians won't experience this day. God destined us for salvation, not for wrath. This is the most important thing for us to remember from these verses. This is Paul's big idea. You don't need more details about when Jesus will return in judgment because that judgment isn't for you. That good news will become abundantly clear as we get further into these verses. Let's get back to the text.

The day of the Lord is unpredictable.

For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 1 Thessalonians 5:2 (ESV)

When Jesus returns in judgment, it will happen at a time people don't expect. It will be like a thief robbing a house. Thieves don't send you postcards letting you know they will rob you on Thursday night from 2:00 AM to 3:00 AM so you can be prepared. They come when you least expect it. Last week, someone told me after the service that if you hear someone predicting the date of the return of Jesus, the one thing you know for sure is they will be wrong. Jesus' return in final judgment is guaranteed to be a surprise. Nobody knows the date.

But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, Matthew 24:36–38 (ESV)

Matthew points out the similarity between God's judgment in the flood and his judgment at the end of time. The book of Genesis tells us that for 120 years, while Noah built the ark, he was a preacher of righteousness. For 120 years, he warned people that God's wrath was coming. He didn't know when, but it was coming. Nobody listened. Life went on as usual until Noah entered the ark, and the rain began. It will be the same way when Jesus returns in final judgment. Life will go on as usual and people will ignore anyone calling them to repentance.

He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority." Acts 1:7 (ESV)

We will never figure out the date of that day. This is why Paul doesn't need to give the Thessalonians additional information about discovering that day. We only need to know it will come as a surprise.

When Jesus talked about this day, he gave us practical application on how to prepare for it.

Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming... Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Matthew 24:42–44 (ESV)

Jesus says that since we do not know when He will return, we should live each day as if Jesus could return on that day. What would you do differently today if Jesus returned before sunset? Is there a phone call you would make? An apology you would offer? An act of kindness you would regret not having done? If so, do it today!

A few years ago, our family picked up the habit of ending every phone conversation with the words, "I love you." We did that because you never know when a phone conversation with your children may be your last. We never want to live with the regret of not having said, "I love you," if those were the final words we have between one another

What signs will precede the Day of the Lord?

As I was studying, a thought struck me. While we have no idea when Jesus will return in final judgment, the Bible does give us signs that the day of the Lord is close. These signs are dramatic.

The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. Joel 2:31 (ESV)

For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. Isaiah 13:10 (ESV)

And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, Luke 21:25 (ESV)

...the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. Acts 2:20 (ESV)

Before the final day of the Lord, the sun and moon will turn dark. The stars will not shine. There will be great signs in the heavens. The oceans will go out of wack because the moon's gravitational pull will be off.

Here is another sign.

Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 (ESV)

We will study this verse in greater depth this fall when we study 2 Thessalonians. The big picture is clear: A man of great lawlessness will be revealed. He will get himself into the center of power ruling the earth—it looks like a one-world government. He will proclaim himself to be God, outlawing worship to anyone or anything other than himself. He will sit in the temple of God in Jerusalem.

While we do not know the exact time of Jesus' return in judgment, and we should live as if he could return any day, there are some crazy signs, such as the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars, and the installation of a world ruler who will proclaim himself to be God, that the end of the world and Jesus' return in final judgment is near.

The day of the Lord is unavoidable.

While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 1 Thessalonians 5:3 (ESV)

This is interesting. Even though the sun and moon are going dark, and a world ruler has taken over the planet, abolishing all other religions and forcing the world to worship him as God, at that time, people will proclaim this as a time of peace and security.

In your translation, you will notice the words, "There is peace and security." Are in quotes. Paul quoted this. Where did it come from? It was a slogan of the Roman Empire. Rome was good at providing worldwide peace through a worldwide government. They put this slogan on their money. They paid authors to write about the peace of Rome provided. Everyone in the Roman Empire was required to worship the Roman emperor. They didn't have to worship the emperor instead of other gods, just in addition to their god. At the end times, it will be a time similar to a revived Roman Empire where worship of the emperor was required. This time, emperor worship won't just be required. It will be exclusive.

While the fabric of creation is falling apart with the sun, moon, and stars, and Satan is working through the man of lawlessness to market a false worldwide peace, this illusion of peace is being pulled off by demonic powers.

For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Matthew 24:24 (ESV)

When Jesus returns in judgment, it will be a complete surprise, like a thief in the night.

It will also be unavoidable, like the pain of a pregnant woman going into labor. When labor starts, it is not going to stop. It is unavoidable. I imagine the demonically empowered leader of the worldwide government thinking he can stop Jesus when he returns, so he will launch a pile of nukes at Jesus. That is pointless. Nuclear missiles can't stop Jesus. Remember how Peter describes that day.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. 2 Peter 3:10 (ESV)

This will be a terrible day of judgment of the nations and sinners. Incidentally, there are no signs in the Bible to prepare us for Jesus' return to save his people. There are signs to warn people that Jesus will return in final judgment. They are radical, like the sun, moon, and stars refusing to shine, and a worldwide government that demands worship as God. Despite the radical nature of these signs, people will miss them because they are so thoroughly deceived by Satan, his demons, false prophets, and the worldwide ruler of darkness.

Some Thessalonians Christians were worried about that day. Maybe the is you this morning. After all the foolish and sinful choices you have made, you feel like you deserve the wrath of Jesus. Friends, here is the good news. We won't be there on the Day of the Lord. We won't face judgment. We are destined for Jesus' saving mercy, not his wrath. The rest of the text gives us two reasons why we don't need to worry about experiencing the terrifying Day of the Lord.

Why do Christians not need to worry about the day of the Lord?

We are part of the kingdom of light, not darkness.

But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. 1 Thessalonians 5:4–5 (ESV)

In this section, Paul divides history into two groups. There are people of the night and darkness, people of the day and the light. There are only two groups in the world. Which group you are in depends on what you have done with Jesus in your life.

Jesus is described as the source of life and light in this world. He saves guys from the kingdom of darkness.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, Colossians 1:13 (ESV)

Jesus delivers us from the kingdom of darkness and transfers us to his kingdom of light and life.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 1 John 1:5 (ESV)

God has nothing to do with darkness.

Paul says, as you think about that terrible day when Jesus returns in judgment against sin and to topple the worldwide ruler who proclaimed himself to be God and he demands worship as God, know that is not a day for you. It is a day for people in the kingdom of darkness. It is not a day for people of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of light. Jesus returned to save us, not pour his wrath on us. Jesus forgave ALL our sins. Jesus gives us a resurrection body that will not die, just like his own. We will live with Jesus forever. We will one day live

in the physical new creation with heaven and earth combined as one and sin stripped out of the planet. This day of final judgment is not for us.

The Christians in Thessalonica, who were worried about having fallen back into sin, so they thought they would not just be saved by Jesus, but also experience the just wrath of Jesus are wrong. We are no longer part of the kingdom of darkness. We are part of the kingdom of light, where all of our sin is forgiven.

So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober,... 1 Thessalonians 5:6–8a (ESV)

This sounds confusing, but it isn't. There are two kingdoms in this world. The kingdom of light and darkness. He says, know which kingdom you are part of and act like the kingdom to which you belong. If you do, you won't feel so insecure about the day of final judgment.

People who are part of the kingdom of darkness do things associated with darkness. They sleep and get drunk. People associated with light and the day, do things associated with light and the day. They are awake and sober. As a Christian, don't involve yourself in the old lifestyle that came from a life of darkness. Pursue a new lifestyle that comes with being part of the kingdom of light and the day. If you do, you won't experience so much anxiety about the day of the Lord since that day isn't for you.

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12 (ESV)

When we become a Christian, it isn't just about what we believe in our head, but what we believe in our head will change the choices we make in life.

...to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’ Acts 26:18 (ESV)

This was God’s commission to Paul about what he was to do with his life. He was to tell people about Jesus. By Jesus, people will turn from the power of Satan to God. They will move from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. They will be forgiven of their sins and are given a place among those who are made holy before God by their faith in Jesus.

Jesus transfers us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. The Day of the Lord, when Jesus returns in judgment is not a day for Christians. We are part of a different kingdom, the kingdom of the day, of the light, those who are saved by Jesus. We will not experience the wrath of Jesus.

Let me give a word of practical advice. As students graduate and prepare for college, I remember what it was like when I went to college. When you are finally away from your parent’s watchful eyes and living for yourself, it is easy to fall into a worldly lifestyle and act like people of the night, people of the darkness. We can watch what we want to watch. We can go wherever we want to go. We can drink what we want to drink. It looks like people are the world are having fun. Let’s try it. When you get far enough down that road, it leads to shame and regret. Paul says, your lifestyle in college has nothing to do with your parents. This has to do with Jesus. You are part of a different kingdom. You have a different king. You are not a man or woman that is part of the kingdom of darkness doing the things associated with darkness. You are a man or woman of the kingdom of the light. You pursue doing the things of the day, of the light. It

has nothing to do with your parents. It is about the kingdom you belong to. Jesus is your king.

...having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. 1 Thessalonians 5:8b (ESV)

Not only are we a member of a different kingdom so we live differently, but Paul says we wear armor in the battle. We have a breastplate covering our chest of faith and love, but we also have a helmet, which is the hope of salvation. It isn't as obvious in English, but in Greek, there is emphasis in this list. It is the helmet. The helmet is what protects us from fatal blows to the head. Body blows slow us down. Headshots take us out. Paul says, as you go through life, and you battle it out with sin, as Christians, remember we are wearing a helmet, which is our salvation in Jesus. We may make a mess of things in life, but Jesus is our salvation. He is the one who protects us from fatal blows.

We are destined for salvation through Jesus, not wrath.

For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. 1 Thessalonians 5:9–10 (ESV)

The first reason we don't worry about Jesus' day of judgment is because of our status. We are children of the day and the light, not children of night and darkness. God's wrath is not for us. The second reason we don't have to worry about the day of final judgment is because God's wrath is not our destiny.

In eternity past, God chose us before we chose him. He had a destiny for us, even before the universe began. Paul says that if we look back down the corridors of time, as Christians, God destined us not for wrath but for his indescribable and undeserved mercy. He chose our destiny to be one of

salvation through Jesus Christ. If you are a Christian today, even if you are a struggling Christian who has fallen into sin again and again, as you call out to Jesus again and again for forgiveness, you need to know your salvation is not ultimately based on how tightly you are holding onto Jesus but on how tightly he chose in eternity past to hold on to you. He will never let you go.

...even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. Ephesians 1:4 (ESV)

Before the foundation of the world was laid, God knew you. God had a plan for you. That plan didn't involve you experiencing his wrath. It was for us to experience his incomprehensible and completely undeserved mercy through Jesus. Do you understand how great that is? Do you realize that if God wanted to bless you more, he could not bless us more than what he has already done for us through Jesus. Think about this. We deserve to be in the lake of fire with the devil and his angels, but we are completely forgiven. All of our sin is taken away. We are now adopted brothers and sisters of Jesus, the one who fashioned everything that exists in the vast universe, the one who created life, the one who created every angelic being in the universe. We are His adopted brothers and sister. That is mind blowing. What could be better? Right now, Jesus is the only one in the universe with a resurrection body. Jesus' resurrection body is the only thing in the universe that will not grow old, get weak, and die. We will have resurrection bodies just like Jesus'. God couldn't create a better physical body than the resurrection body he created for his own son, yet we will have identical resurrection bodies to Jesus' own. How can you improve on this? How could God

be more gracious to us than what he has already done for us through Jesus?

This is incomprehensible!

When you have those times, when you fall by back into sin, and you are filled with fear that when Jesus returns in judgment, he will show his wrath against you, know that before time began, in God's mind, your destiny is to receive salvation and incomprehensible kindness through Jesus, not God's wrath. This was your destiny even before you were born.

...who died for us... 1 Thessalonians 5:9–10 (ESV)

As Paul reminds them, the forgiveness of our sin is not based on the perfection of our lives but on the comprehensive power of Jesus' death for sin on the cross. Jesus' death for our sins has already paid for all of our sins. Not just the sins we have committed but also the sins we will commit, even when we know better. God is that good. Jesus' death on the cross for our sins is that great. The good news of Jesus is so good. If people could only comprehend it, they would be running to Jesus to experience the forgiveness and new life he offers.

...so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. 1 Thessalonians 5:10b (ESV)

I love these words. As Christians, it doesn't matter if we are living or dead, our identity is Jesus. Our life is about Jesus. Our destiny is to be forever with Jesus. Living or dead, we will be with Jesus, and nothing can take us away from him, even when we fall back into our old sins.

Comfort one another with this truth.

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (ESV)

Paul reminds us that the purpose of these verses is not to develop end-times charts and graphs about the end of the world. As he said earlier, you already have all the information you need to know. The purpose of these verses is to encourage discouraged Christians who find themselves entangled again in a web of sin.

The day of the Lord, when Jesus returns to judge sin, is unpredictable and unavoidable, but as Christians, it is not something we need to worry about. Even if we fall back into sin, it is not a day for us. We are no longer part of the kingdom of darkness. We are part of the kingdom of light, the kingdom of the day. God's wrath against sin is not for us. In eternity past, even before the world was formed, God's destiny for us is to receive unfathomable grace through Jesus, not wrath for our sin.

Those are words every Christian needs to hear. Amen.



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