

# Not Surprised by Christ's Coming

## 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

*Strong & Ready! (Books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians)*

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[livinghopechurch.net](http://livinghopechurch.net)

**Introduction:** Open your Bible to 1 Thessalonians 5. I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: "Not Surprised by Christ's Coming."

"Jesus will come bathed in radiant splendor, enveloped within an atmosphere of indescribable brilliance, surrounded by the ear-piercing praise of angels and saints. Scintillating light shining from His eyes. Irresistible power pouring from His hands. None will deny His beauty or escape its transforming energy."

- **Sam Storms**

### Reading of Holy Scripture

1 Thess. 5:1-11, "Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup>For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup>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.

<sup>4</sup>But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup>For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. <sup>6</sup>So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. <sup>7</sup>For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. <sup>8</sup>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.

<sup>9</sup>For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup>who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. <sup>11</sup>Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."

I. The Seriousness of Christ's coming (5: 1-3).

II. The Anticipation of Christ's coming (5: 4-8).

III. The Joy of Christ's coming (5:9-11).

[READ SAM STORMS QUOTE]

### I. **The Seriousness of Christ's coming**, (1 Thess. 5:1-3).

#### Hyper Focus on Dates and Times

1 Thess. 5:1, "Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you." There had been sufficient teaching on the coming of Christ from

St. Paul, but it is often the case that Christians want to learn about eschatology more out of curiosity than out of holiness.

The Lord Jesus Christ will return to judge the living and the dead, but no one knows the date or time. Speculation is dangerous. Jesus told his disciples, 'No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father' (Matt. 24:36). Instead of speculating about dates, our responsibility as Christians is to fulfill our duties and to **serve the Lord with all our strength**. In that way, we shall be prepared for Christ's return whenever he comes.<sup>1</sup>

John MacArthur makes this point: Being spiritually prepared for the return of Christ does not involve date setting, clock watching, or sign seeking. God has chosen not to reveal the specific time of end-time events so that all believers will live in constant anticipation of them. The Thessalonians had the information; what they needed was preparation.<sup>2</sup>

Howell, Mark (2015-01-13). *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)* (p. 131). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

### **When He Appears**

The right response to eschatology is holiness. **1 John 3:1-3**, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him."<sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."<sup>3</sup> And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."

### **A Solemn Warning: Be Ready!**

**1 Thess. 5:1-2**, "Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you."<sup>2</sup> For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."

### **As in the Days of Noah**

'As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.'

'Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him' (Matt. 24:37–44).

<sup>1</sup> Shenton, T. (2006). *Opening up 1 Thessalonians* (p. 94). Leominster: Day One Publications.

<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 143

### A Surprise to Unbelievers

The day of the Lord will take unbelievers by complete surprise. While they are speaking to one another about 'peace and safety', destruction will 'come on them suddenly'. As they go about their daily lives, sunk in a deadly spiritual apathy, the wrath of God will unexpectedly sweep them away.

Unbelievers only believe what they can see. As they cannot see the judgment of God approaching, they dismiss it as fantasy or scaremongering. They encourage each other with false hopes when they talk optimistically about the future, unaware that eternal damnation is on the horizon and about to engulf them. They are not realistic about what is going to happen. They are deaf to the warnings of God, absorbed in their own selfishness, and utterly blind to the judgment that is hanging over them. In every sense they are unprepared for that fast-approaching day.<sup>3</sup>

### Not a Surprise to Believers

Paul describes the Day of the Lord as a "thief" (5: 2). The coming of a thief is never a joyful, announced event. No thief ever informs a victim of his intentions before the crime. The Day of the Lord is going to surprise some people. Yet when Paul speaks of those who will be surprised, he does not have in mind the Thessalonians. Their response will be much different. "But you, brothers, are not in the dark," Paul writes, "for this day to overtake you like a thief" (5:4).<sup>4</sup>

### An Indifferent Response: Peace and Security

**1 Thess. 5:3**, "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."

The shift from "you" to "they" in verses 2 and 3 is noteworthy. An unbelieving world responds to God with a frank indifference. God's solemn warnings of judgment are often met by the world's yawn. This response is vividly portrayed by the words "peace and security." Oblivious to God's imminent judgment, and thinking that life is just fine, the world goes about its business. However, Paul says that the Day of the Lord will overtake them "like a thief in the night" (v. 2).

### Indifference Does Not Help

Jesus also warned of the danger of indifference when choosing a foundation on which to build: But everyone who hears these words of Mine and doesn't act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed. And its collapse was great! (Matt 7: 26-27) Indifference toward God, however, is no less deadly than willful rejection of God. Either way the consequences are the same (5:3b). Turning your back on a problem does not make it go away. Cries of "peace and security" are powerless to change your circumstances.

### A Sobering Result

**1 Thess. 5:3**, "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."

<sup>3</sup> Shenton, 95-96.

<sup>4</sup> Howell, Mark (2015-01-13). Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 133). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

### God's Judgment Inescapable

Consider what thieves do. Without warning, they interrupt your peace and take away your security. Paul illustrates Christ's coming with thief/ pregnancy imagery which illustrates the inescapability of divine judgment for those who have rejected Christ.

As John Stott puts it, "The thief gives you no warning, and labor pains give you no escape".<sup>5</sup>

Thus when the Day of the Lord begins, it will move unalterably to its inescapable end.

### Compassion for the Lost

The 'destruction' that Paul mentions is the 'everlasting destruction' of **2 Thessalonians 1:9–10**, when those who do not know God or obey the gospel will be punished 'with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power, on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marvelled at among all those who have believed'. It is the utter hopelessness of a Godless existence and an eternal ruin.

This destruction is as inevitable 'as labor pains on a pregnant woman', and there will be no escape. When Christ returns it will be too late to repent and believe. All who have rejected Christ will be summoned to the bar of God to receive their condemnation.

For Christians, these few verses should put urgency in our hearts to win people for Christ. There is only heaven and hell on that day and nothing else. May God stir us into action to pray and preach and witness, knowing that the eternal destiny of our neighbors, friends and family is at stake.<sup>6</sup>

So there is **seriousness** when we consider the Second coming.

## II. The **Anticipation** of Christ's coming, (1 Thess. 5:4-8).

**1 Thess. 5:4-8**, "But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup>For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. <sup>6</sup>So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. <sup>7</sup>For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. <sup>8</sup>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."

### The Contrast

In chapter 5 Paul uses vivid vocabulary to contrast the destiny of those who honor God with those who choose to ignore Him. Note how he describes the future judgment of those who ignore God: surprise, destruction, darkness, pain, and no escape. Now contrast those concepts with how Paul describes the future destiny of those who honor God: light, salvation, and alive with Christ. The differences are striking. Paul singles out these differences to make a very important point: the Thessalonians had no need to fear future judgment. Why? Because when they embraced Christ, **He transformed them from children of wrath to children of God** (Eph

<sup>5</sup> Stott, Gospel and the End, 109

<sup>6</sup> Shenton, 96-97.

2: 3-6). As Paul told the Colossians, the Father “rescued [them] from the domain of darkness and transferred [them] into the kingdom of the Son He loves” (Col 1: 13).

### **We Walk in the Light**

**1 Thess. 5:4-5**, “But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup>For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.”

We are not fearful in the dark, but excited in the light! Christians should never be caught off guard by future events because they recognize that God is moving human history toward a final consummation. Knowing that this consummation is soon— albeit not knowing when— provides incentive and motivation to make the most of every day.

### **Children of Light Know the Outcome**

We are sometimes afraid with world events but instead we ought to look at the final outcome. We are children of light. We know the ending!

### **WE LIVE WITH PURPOSE**

**1 Thess. 5:6-8**, “So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. <sup>7</sup>For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. <sup>8</sup>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.”

### **Be alert and self-controlled**

It is unnatural to sleep when the midday sun is shining in our eyes, so it is unnatural to sleep spiritually now that we are children of the light. Sleep is natural to those who live in darkness, for it is the sleep of being insensible and helplessly unaware of the judgment to come. But Christians must not be like that. Instead, we are to be:

**‘Alert.’** We are to be watchful, sober and spiritually awake. We are as Ephesians says, to “walk circumspectly.” As we wait for our Savior from heaven, we must be morally alert and live a holy life in view of the day of the Lord. We must live on earth in a way that pleases the Lord as we wait for him to take us to heaven. ‘Night’ is the element and sphere of unbelievers, the time when they sleep and get drunk, which is the opposite of being spiritually and morally awake. In many ways, the uncertainty about the date of Christ’s second coming should make Christians more watchful.

“Therefore be alert, since you don’t know when the master of the house is coming— whether in the evening or at midnight or at the crowing of the rooster or early in the morning. Otherwise, he might come suddenly and find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to everyone: Be alert!” (Mark 13: 35-37)

**‘Self-Controlled.’** We must be filled with a moral and spiritual earnestness, calm and steady in our faith and actions, and faithfully performing our duty as we look forward to that day.

Jesus gave his disciples this warning: ‘Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth.’

Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man' (Luke 21:34–36).

### **Put on faith, love and hope**

We are at war. **1 Thess. 5:7-8**, “For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. <sup>8</sup>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.” We must fight with the right weapons.

**Be on Guard.** As the Thessalonians ‘belong to the day’, they must behave accordingly. They are told for a second time to be ‘self-controlled’. In other words, they must watch over their hearts and lives in the same way as an armed soldier standing on guard is careful not to get drunk or fall asleep, which would not only be a dereliction of duty, but dangerous to himself and the people he is meant to be protecting.

**Put on God's Armor.** Paul exhorts them to put on the whole spiritual armor of God. Faith and love act as a breastplate that protects the heart, and the hope of salvation is a helmet that guards the mind. Faith is that certain knowledge of God, his promises and salvation; love is a yielding to God in joyful obedience; and hope, which looks to the future, is an assurance of salvation which goes hand in hand with obedience. The breastplate and helmet are the spiritual defense we have against the world. With them in place, we shall be ready for the day of Christ's return.<sup>7</sup>

## **III. The Joy of Christ's coming, (1 Thess. 5:9-11).**

### **John Calvin: Progress in the Christian Life**

Calvin said it this way, “Let us consider this settled: that all who have made progress in the school of Christ will joyfully await the day of death and final resurrection... Let us not hesitate to await the Lord's coming, not only with longing, but also with groaning and sighs, as the happiest thing of all. He will come to us as Redeemer.”<sup>8</sup>

### **We are Delivered from wrath**

**1 Thess. 5:9**, “For God has not destined us for wrath...”

If you have ever had the unfortunate experience of being pulled over by a policeman then you know the full range of emotions that sweep over you when you see the blue lights in your rearview mirror. Surprise, frustration, and guilt might be a few words to describe these emotions. Of course, you probably could add a few more of your own. Now think about the different emotions that you experienced when the policeman told you that he was not going to give you a ticket. Can you say, “RELIEF”? Maybe you actually deserved the ticket, and maybe you did not, but the response that you received from the policeman was not what you were expecting.<sup>9</sup>

Our calling proves that God has not destined us to suffer his just and eternal wrath against sin. Instead, as children of the light, he has appointed us ‘to receive salvation through our Lord

<sup>7</sup> Shenton, 98-100.

<sup>8</sup> *Institutes*, 3.9.5.

<sup>9</sup> Howell, 140.

Jesus Christ'. God has chosen us to enjoy his grace and mercy forever. He is the source of our salvation and Jesus Christ is its only mediator.<sup>10</sup>

### **We are Delivered from sin**

**1 Thess. 5:9-10**, "For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup>who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him..."

We are to "obtain salvation." Don't leave that word in a dusty theological dictionary. That means we are delivered from sin and being conformed progressively into the image of Jesus!

### **We are Delivered from discouragement**

**1 Thess. 5:9:11**, "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."

If these words sound familiar, they are. Paul used the same words at the end of chapter 4. In both texts Paul begins by addressing the Thessalonians' confusion about future events and ends with a strong note of exhortation (4:18; 5:11). Again, Paul gives them truth in order to bring them from confusion to confidence. A strong dose of God's Word is always the appropriate remedy for a confused and troubled heart.

### **Conclusion**

The primary motivation of the reality of Christ's coming is not speculation, but edification!

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<sup>10</sup> Shenton, 100.