

STUDY 6 - 1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

The theme of the return of Christ continues into chapter 5, but the focus here is now on how we live in the light of it. Paul refers to the return of Christ as “the day of the Lord” (verse 1). This is more than just the physical return of Jesus Christ to this earth, but the great day of judgement and salvation, the day the Old Testament prophets looked ahead to and prophesied about. This is a day which will be terrifying yet also wonderful for those who know Christ. Look at Zephaniah 1:14-18, and Malachi 3:2-4, 4:1-3 for examples of the Old Testament background to the day of the Lord.

In verse 1 Paul says there is “no need” to have details of times and dates – because we already know what we need to know. We know that Jesus’ return will be like a “thief in the night”. Thieves do not send cards to inform when they are arriving. Because of this, his return will be unexpected by some. People will be living as they have always lived, and like in the time of Jeremiah people will be saying that there will always be peace – but Jesus’ inevitable return will come, judgement will happen, and there will be the destruction of the wicked. Just as none of Christ’s people will miss out on being raised to life on the last day (remember 4:15-17), no one will be missed in the judgement (“they will not escape”). Notice how clearly 1 Thessalonians speaks of the judgement that is to come.

However believers are different. Although we don’t know when this is going to happen, we are prepared for it so will not be surprised. We interpret our world through the lens of God’s word, not through our own minds. In verses 5 to 7 there are a series of contrasts which draw out the difference knowing Christ is going to return makes on the way we live. We are not living in the darkness of sin and the rejection of God, enjoying life in the night. We are not asleep or drunk – spending our life satisfying our senses, not realising what life is really about, and dulling ourselves with alcohol or pleasure to the urgency of our situation.

Positively, we belong to the light, as Christ, the light of the world, has shone the light of his salvation into our life. We know where we are going, and live in the light of the day of the Lord that is coming (read John 8:12 and 12:36 for

Jesus using this imagery). We are people who are alert and self controlled because we know how serious life is and we are waiting for this coming day of the Lord.

How then can we wait and live like this in the midst of people who don't believe Jesus is returning? Paul says that we can because we have put on the armour of God to enable us to wait expectantly for that day (verse 8). The NIV treats verse 8 as a command, but that is misleading as "let us" is not there in the original. Don't be too distracted by the fact that the order is slightly different to Ephesians 5 – the point is the same. God has clothed us with all we need to stand firm. The armour imagery hasn't come from Paul drawing inspiration from Roman soldier, but from Isaiah 59:17 where God himself is described as being clothed in armour as he comes to redeem his people. We are clothed in Christ so are protected from evil. As a result we can be "sober"/"self controlled" – not panicked by what is to come, or distracted by the world around us.

This is underlined by verses 9-11. The great and terrible day of the Lord is coming, but we can look forward to it. We will not "suffer wrath", that has been taken for us by Christ on the cross. God would not be just if he punished us twice. What we are looking forward to is "salvation". We look back to his death (verse 10) to see that that will be the case. And this is true for all Christians, alive and dead. Paul concludes this section by calling on us to encourage each other with these words, repeating his order of 4:18.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Read Zephaniah 1:14-18 and Malachi 3:2-4 and 4:1-3. What do the Old Testament prophets say about the day of the Lord?

Why does Paul not need to write about times and dates? What do we know about the day of the Lord (verses 1-3)?

How are we different in our thinking about the day of the Lord? (Verse 4)

What sets of contrasts are used in Paul's description of how we are to live in the light of the day of the Lord? What do they tell us about how we are and are not to live (verses 5-7)?

How can we live like this, even though those around us are not? NOTE – Verse 8 should read “you have put on” rather than “putting on”

Why can we look forward to the day of the Lord (verse 9-10)?

What should we do with this teaching? (Verse 11)