

Prayer

Lord God Almighty, Your piercing gaze uncovers our souls;
Yet we are not always willing to accept Your truth, advice or help.
Break down our own resistance to the work of Your Spirit with us,
So we may be fed by the sound of Your voice and the truth of Your Word,
That we may find so much more beyond the world of 'self' in which we live.
Liberate us in Your glory, Lord God Almighty, and lead us on, we pray: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Politicians

It is a very difficult time for UK politics and there is a lot of anger in the country against politicians. Please pray that God will use this to create better politics at Westminster.

On-going prayers

- Pray for the key political issues in your country at the moment
- Give thanks for the love and care shown to you by other people
- Pray for those who spend their lives driving lorries on roads

Meditation

Glory! The clouds have lifted and my spirit bursts with joy!
Nothing can eradicate the destiny I've been given,
And everything that occupies my life for now
Prepares me for a glory that is sure, but yet to be revealed!

Praise! My soul would strike every barrier opposing me
So worship may consume my soul this day!
What can stop the outpouring of the heart's intent;
The triumph of salvation may be dead to some but not to me!

Wonder! The precious sounds of those I love grow stronger,
And by Your graciousness the past comes clean.
Ignite the brightest fires of love inside my heart.
So life may take its fullest meaning, now and in eternity.

Bible Study - 1 Thess 5:1-5

¹ Now concerning the times and the seasons, fellow believers, you have no need to be written to. ² For you know with accuracy that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ When they say, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come on them, as labor pains come to a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! ⁴ But you, fellow believers, are not in such darkness that the day will surprise you like a thief; ⁵ for you are all children of light and children of the day. Neither are we of the night or of darkness.

Review

At the end of the previous chapter, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about what he believed would happen at the moment of Christ's coming again, and this is where we pick up the letter in our reading today. Paul took up the theme, familiar from Jesus' own teaching (Matt 24:36f.), of the unpredictability of His return, initially by using many of Jesus' own words; 'thief in the night', 'labour pains', 'no escape'. The letter then adds a subtle message as he encouraged the believers at Thessalonica to stand firm in their faith (5:4,5). Having spoken of the time of Christ's coming as like a 'thief in the night', his suggestion that the Thessalonians be 'children of the day' (5:5) suggests strongly that Paul wanted the church to focus on its task and mission in hand, echoing Jesus' teaching elsewhere to do the work of God 'while it is still day' (John 9:4). We remain uncertain about exactly what the Thessalonians felt about the return of Christ, but Paul's teaching was clear, and consistently close to the words of Jesus.

Some who have studied 1 Thessalonians think that the Thessalonians were in danger of accepting wrong beliefs about the return of Christ, but this passage does not suggest this. The reason why Paul spoke about Christ's return in the first place was because of a specific concern they had about what would happen at the resurrection to those who had died before Christ's return (4:13f.). Paul dealt with this perfectly easily, and the general comments about Christ's return that follow this (as in this passage) have a much lighter touch, suggesting that he was not worried about heresy in the church on this matter.

To begin with, Paul mentions the 'times and the seasons' (5:1), using two Greek words 'chronos' and 'kairos' that together encompass all we mean by the word 'time'. 'Chronos', from which we get the word 'chronological' (meaning time sequence), refers to time as measured by a clock; and 'kairos' refers to a moment, event or opportunity, as meant by the expression 'the time will come when ...'. In Paul's day, the two words were used somewhat interchangeably, just as the word 'time' is used today, and the fact that Paul uses these two words in Greek forces each translator to find two appropriate and similar words to construct this sentence. I mention all this, because Paul goes on to play with the idea of time in the next verse. Verse 2 is something of a pun, and this is seen more easily if I express the verse like this; the Thessalonians know accurately that the time (chronos) of Christ's coming cannot be accurately known! Then, he continues by quoting Jesus' own teaching about the accompanying signs of the moment (kairos) of His coming (5:3). The nature of this play on the idea of time is far more obvious in Greek, and I doubt that Paul would have used it if he was trying to make a serious point or defend the faith against a heresy! Paul's writing normally becomes far more theologically intense when he is writing important theses; so by comparison, this is more trivial! He assumes that Christians do not waste their time trying to guess the timing of Jesus' coming when He expressly told His followers that they would not be able to do it!

If there is a serious message to be taken from this passage it is this; we are to live as 'children of the light'. This idea conjures up a picture of getting on with life and doing things, openly, energetically and enthusiastically, and this is exactly what Paul wanted the Thessalonians to take from his letter. Throughout his ministry, Paul taught the urgency of pursuing God's mission of preaching the Gospel and extending the Kingdom of God. He was himself driven by the need to give other people the chance to respond to the Gospel, and do God's will by bringing His light to places of the world that must have seemed very dark indeed to him at that time. These themes are unmistakable in most of his letters (e.g. see Romans 10), and as we move towards the end of his letter, we will find that they come through strongly here in 1 Thessalonians.

It is unfortunate that the church today separates as 'evangelicals' those who wish to follow in Paul's footsteps and work 'in the day' whilst there is still time, to further the Kingdom of God and enable more people to hear the Gospel. It is even more tragic that some

Christians simply do not believe that the whole matter of Christ's coming again has any relevance today. Surely, this is the 'dark' state described by Paul here in verse 4. Surely, all those who have received the benefits of God's grace must be concerned, as the Thessalonians were, to follow genuinely what Jesus said about His return.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Compare what Paul says in this passage with what Jesus says in Matthew 24:36f. and find the equivalent references.
2. Discuss whether some Christians today live in a 'dark' state (see 5:4) whereby they would be surprised if Christ came again.
3. How can we best live as 'children of the light', and what do you think this means?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The whole subject of Christ's coming again always raises passions, but for me, it is a matter of simple logic. The world might last beyond my lifetime, but the scientific evidence now at our disposal is rather uncertain about this assumption. Even if this was not a current topic of debate, I still believe that if God made the world, then He will not only redeem it, but He will save it completely by drawing it to a close and remaking it. It is surely best to be ready for this at any time, even if it does not happen in your lifetime.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Read through verse 3 again, and reflect on what it says about people believing that there will be 'peace and security' before 'sudden destruction' comes. What does this mean to you? Pray about it and talk to others.*
- *Using any Bible tools at your disposal (from the headings in your Bible to a concordance) make a list of the places in the Bible where the coming of Christ in glory, or the end of the world is mentioned (apart from the Revelation of John). Keep this to hand, it can be a helpful reference in your Bible.*

Final Prayer

Stay with us, Lord God, through all the dangers and perils of this day. We ask that we might hold on to You by faith and never let You down; and we ask that You hold on to us with all the might of Your love and Your Holy Spirit. So when the day ends, we ask for the gifts of Your rest and Your peace; thank You, Lord God. AMEN