

## Not of Darkness

24<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Pentecost – 11/15/20 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 4 [Paul says,] **“But you are not in darkness, brothers...”**.

### **Introduction**

- ✘ They just can't help themselves. Every few years, someone shows up to predict when the world will end. Some even go so far as to predict the month and day that all time will end and Jesus will come again.
  - ➔ Most of these “prophets” make their predictions intentionally vague so that they can be explained away when their predictions don't come true, such as astrologer Jeane Dixon, who also said that there would be a cure for cancer by 1967. In 1973 she wrote that Jesus is scheduled to return sometime in the years 2020–2037.
  - ➔ And a computer program named “World One”, which was developed at MIT in 1973 also predicts this year, 2020, to be the year when a series of catastrophic events will kick off a 20-year process of the slow demise of human civilization.
  - ➔ Other popular doomsday prophecies have said the “last day” will come as the result of a nuclear war or an asteroid impact or even a new ice age.
- ✘ Why is it that some people feel the need to make such predictions? And why do most of these predictors classify themselves within the general realm of Christianity – even if their doctrines have little to do with Christ and Scripture?
  - ➔ I think it can be summed up by one word in our text today: “darkness.” For some of them, it might not be total darkness, but it certainly is a near-dark place where they spiritually reside.
- ✘ Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica who were concerned about these things – and to you and me today – to assure us that we don't live in this kind of darkness. No, we who believe in Jesus; because of Jesus, the darkness of sin and death is no longer our primary issue of concern.

### **I. Light/Darkness in Scripture**

- ✘ This concept of light and dark is actually a very common image in Scripture. So it's no surprise that Paul continues with that imagery here today. Let's explore light and darkness then for just a bit first.
  - ➔ What does Scripture mean when it uses darkness and light? It simply means that those of the light are those with faith and those of the darkness are unbelievers caught in their sin. Light = faith in Jesus. Darkness = lack of faith.
- ✘ Look at it this way: In the dark, you can't see where you're going. But also you can't see danger - either danger in your path ahead or danger coming at you.
  - ➔ A person in the dark doesn't know much about, or lives in denial of the realities of his/her surroundings.
- ✘ On the other hand, in the daytime, with all of the light, everything is clearly seen. The path ahead is obvious and if danger comes, you can see it so that you can make moves to avoid it.
  - ➔ In the light, a person is able to be confident about where he's going, and where he'll end up.

- ✘ Now let's connect that to the light of faith. In verse eight Paul says, "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".
  - First, our faith in Christ which God graciously gives us in Baptism, along with His love for us, acts like a "breastplate". It protects our hearts and souls from the flaming arrows and spears of the devil and his worldly temptations that try to get us to follow darkness and unbelief.
  - Second, the "hope" or assurance "of salvation" that we have in Christ alone acts like a helmet to guard our heads; that is our thinking from the many deadly blows that come at us every day – those that seek to sway us away from thinking with "the mind of Christ" that Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:16 we've been given in baptism.
  - Without this light of faith; this "helmet", we would instead allow the man-centered thoughts and arguments that we hear every day in the media and from our friends, neighbors and even family at times, to tell us that Christ's Word in the Bible is just "an old dusty book written by old, dusty men"; or that "trusting in Jesus" as we do for forgiveness and guidance "means we are somehow weak or out of touch or just plain fools".
- ✘ But friends, having faith in Christ gives us the absolute certainty that we will be with Jesus in the glory of glories when this life is over. This folks is what Paul means when he says that we are "walking" in the light!
- ✘ In the darkness however, Paul warns in verses 2-3, "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".
  - The only certainty in darkness is uncertainty. Oh sure, those in darkness often "say" they have certainty in their beliefs, but if they are actually honest, they must admit there is none – except of course for the certainty of death. But still that doesn't answer the question about what happens after a person dies.

## **II. Paul addresses Christ's return & Our sinful lives.**

- ✘ This is the precise reason for why Paul wrote the words of our text this morning; to give greater certainty to the believers of Thessalonica. He writes in verses 1-2, "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". When Paul refers to "times and seasons" he is making a connection to his previous segment where he describes the future glory of all who believe in Jesus as their Savior.
  - He says in chapter four, verses 15-16, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord". This is what the Thessalonians and you and I already know and believe as Christians.
- ✘ So Paul speaks to the obvious question that comes up next: "When will that glory come?" Paul addresses that question to dispel two common sins that come up regarding this topic.
  - The first is this: our sinful nature doesn't want to believe in something unless we have some kind of concrete evidence. We want specifics so that we can plan accordingly. At least that's what we say out loud. But you see, if we were to get some specifics, then it would lessen our need to have faith in the words of Scripture. It would reduce the necessity that we trust in God's perfect providence for our future. It would completely negate our need to trust in what Christ did

to save us. So, if we were to at least know the day and time – well, that would mean that faith is no longer required. And without faith, there is no need for Jesus to return at all.

→ The second reason Paul addresses the question about the day and time of the Christ's return is that if we knew, then we would think we could live however we want until just before that day, and then clean up our act just before His arrival. As sinners, we want that possibility. But Paul knows the ploy. So he says in verses 6-7, "Let us not sleep" (in our faith), "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".

✘ I know, many of you are undoubtedly thinking, "That's not what I would do if I knew the day and time of Jesus' return". We want to confidently say in faith, "I will never quit trusting in what God has done for me. I will not, by any means, stop living my life to the honor of God in everything I do".

→ And it's great to think and desire that. But you know, deep down, that our real tendency is to think and do first those things that please self instead of God; to avoid caring for someone else in need and instead try to find a way out of it. You and I both know that we fight these thoughts of darkness regularly.

✘ That's one of the primary reasons that Jesus gave His life – to forgive our sin; and especially the temptation to stop trusting Him; to live in what Paul calls a spiritually "drunk" manner where our sense of faith is so dulled by sin and the world that we are easily influenced to live and speak and act in a manner that is not in line with Christ and His desire for us.

### III. It's actually a gift not to know "when"

✘ All of this means, friends, that it actually is a great gift not to know the day or the time or the season when Jesus will come again.

→ Paul says in verses 4-5 that what we do know is quite enough: "Concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ... 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" (vv. 1, 4–5).

✘ We know this, and so we are freed up to focus as Christians on what really counts. First, is our focus on what we believe with all our hearts upon what God has made us to be – "children of the light".

→ Verses 9-10 tell us, "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". Understand folks, you have received that salvation and faith through the Word given in your Baptism and spoken into your ears. You really are His very own children of light right now, and forever.

✘ The second thing that really counts and is made easier without focusing upon some day or date or season in the future is that now we can just let Christ freely live in and through us.

→ And doing so, means that those around us will see something different in us than they do in those who live without the light. Instead of attitudes and priorities and things meant for night and darkness, now they see Jesus in us; in the way that we love them and others unconditionally; in the confidence and peace we have in times of trouble and distress because we know that our future is already determined and secure.

✘ I don't need to tell you this: Being children of the light, children of the heavenly Father completely changes what life is and what life is all about now!

- ➔ No longer do we live for self, but for the One who saved us and for the people with whom God desires us to share His love. That's what it means to no longer live in darkness, but to be children of the light; children of Christ.
- ⊗ How exciting it is then for us to hear Jesus encourage and build us up in Matthew 5:16 when He says, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

## **Conclusion**

- ⊗ Yes Christians, shine that light full and bright! Praise God that He has come to us to make us His children of light. Praise God that He lives in and through us so that we are alert and sober in our faith here in this life, and when we proclaim what is ahead in the life to come.
  - ➔ "You are not in darkness brothers" and sisters (v.4). "You are all" Christ's "children of light" (v.5). Amen.