

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11**

**Sermon: Darkness Into Light**

With one more Sunday in the Church Year, we look forward even more intently to not just the Advent and Christmas seasons, but to the never-ending season of heaven. We look forward with excitement; this time of waiting is no time for complacency! The

Old Testament Reading: ***“At that time I will search Jerusalem***

***with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent,***

***those who say in their hearts, ‘The Lord will not do good, nor***

***will he do ill.’ Their goods shall be plundered, and their***

***houses laid waste.” The Lord will do something, something***

***spectacular: “The great day of the Lord is near, near and***

***hastening fast”*** (Zephaniah 1:12–13a, 14a).

Evil, all evil, will not only be punished, but be removed. Our Psalm this morning reminds us we simply don't have enough time to be complacent; we may live seventy or eighty years, but those are soon gone (Psalm 90:10)! And the Gospel makes very clear that we can't just "bury" the talents God has given us but are to use them honorably, for there will be a reckoning (Matthew 25:24–30). Rather, while we await Christ's return, knowing he comes with salvation, we are active, living out our faith, as children not of darkness, but of light (Epistle, 1 Thessalonians 5:4–9).

Every few years, someone tries to predict when the world will end. They just can't seem to help themselves. Some even go so far as to predict the month and day that time will end, and Jesus will come for his second advent.

Why is it that some feel the need to try to make such predictions? Even though many of these predictors fall into the general realm of Christianity, even if rather unsound in some of their doctrines. Our text from 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians gives us a possible one-word answer to the why: "darkness." For some it might not be total darkness, but it certainly is a near-dark setting in which they live spiritually.

Paul writes our text today to reassure us that we don't live in this kind of darkness. Instead, for us who believe in Jesus, because of Christ, the darkness of sin and death is gone.

The concepts of light and dark are used rather often in Scripture, and it's no surprise that Paul would continue with that imagery. Just what is it that is meant with the usage of darkness and light? Very simply, it means that those of the light are those with faith and those of the darkness are unbelievers.

Let's look at it this way. In the dark, not only can't one see where he's going; he can't see danger, danger either in his path or coming toward him. He simply doesn't know much about what's out in front or surrounding him. On the other hand, in the daytime, all can be seen. There's no question about the path on which he walks. And if danger comes, he can see it and make moves to avoid it. Indeed, in the light, one can have great confidence about himself, about where he's going, and where he'll end up.

So, with faith, it's as though all confidence has been given. One knows who he is, knows where he goes, and knows where he'll end up. Faith in Christ, the faith God so graciously gives in Baptism, allows one to know, without any doubting, that he belongs to God.

Faith in Christ allows one to know that the path he walks in life is a God-given path, walking in the manner of Jesus—serving others, honoring God in all one does. Faith in Christ allows one to know, with absolute certainty, that he will be with Jesus in the glory of glories when this life is over. This is most certainly being in the light!

But in the darkness, it's the absolute opposite. Paul warns, ***“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”*** (vs 2b–3). The only certainty in darkness is uncertainty. Yes, one could say that there will certainly be death but what happens after one dies.

This is the reason for Paul writing the words of our passage this morning, to give greater certainty to the believers of Thessalonica. He writes, ***“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”*** (vs 1–2).

When Paul begins this segment with the words, “times and seasons,” he’s adding information to the previous segment in which he describes the future glory for those who believe in the Christ: ***“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”*** (4:16–17).

Paul is addressing the normal inquisitive nature of wondering when that glory will come. He addresses this question for two primary reasons, both addressing the sins normally committed in this arena. One is that our sinful nature just doesn't want to trust without having some concrete evidence. We just want the Lord to give us some specifics so that we can plan accordingly. If we know the specifics, well, then, it diminishes our need to have faith in the words of Scripture, our need to trust in God's perfect providence for our future, or even our need to trust in what God did in Christ to save us. Thus, if we know the day and time, we could say, in a sense, that faith isn't really required.

The second reason for Paul addressing this question about the day and time of the return of Christ is that if we knew, then we'd think we could live however we want until then and clean up our act just before Jesus' arrival, should that actually be possible. But Paul knows that ploy: ***"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"*** (vs 6–7).

Now, it may well be that we each are thinking at this moment that that's not what I'd do if I knew the day and time of Jesus' return. "I will not quit trusting in what God has done for me, and I will not, by any means, stop living my life to the honor of God in everything I do." But we know, deep down, that our real tendency is to think and do that which pleases self and not God, to avoid caring for others and instead try to get out of it.

In actuality it's a great gift not to know, not to know the day or the time or the season when Jesus will come again. 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"*** (vs. 1, 4–5).

By not knowing, we can focus on what really counts; that we believe and believe with all our hearts that God has made us children of the light. He did so by buying us back from the clutches of Satan and our sin: ***"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"*** (vs 9–10).

And God made us children of this wonderful future by giving us faith through the Word in our Baptism and in our ears. We really are his very own children and we will be such for now and for all eternity.

***“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. . . . Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing”*** (vs 8, 11).

Being children of the light changes what life is and what life is all about. One no longer lives for self, but for the Christ who saved us and for the people with whom we are to share God’s love. That is the sum and substance of being no longer of the darkness, but being children of the light, being children of the heavenly Father.

By not being of the darkness, by being children of the light, we belong, truly belong, to God the Father, God Almighty. In that most precious status, he has removed all the sins we have and ever will commit. So we offer our thanks and praise to God for taking us out of the darkness and making us his children of light.

Amen