

January 24, 2021
Sunday Evening Service
Series: 1 Thessalonians
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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THE DAY OF THE LORD 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

All of you who drive are familiar with what is commonly called an “idiot light” on the dashboard of your vehicle. The manufacturers install these lights for a reason. When there is a problem with the car (sometimes minor, sometimes not so minor), the light shows up to warn us to take a particular necessary action.

Too often we ignore these lights. Why would we do that? Maybe the first time a particular warning light came on, you rushed your vehicle to the repair shop to check it out. But the mechanic might have said something like, “Well, I scanned your system with the computer and there doesn’t seem to be a problem, so I just reset your car’s computer.”

That is why some of your friends have concluded that the “check engine” light that comes on every time they start their car simply serves as a notice that the car has an engine. I have learned that the “check tire pressure” indicator is always unreliable on my car. A mechanic told me that things as simple as driving down a gravel road will cause it to give a false reading. And so we take a lot of warning lights with a grain of salt.

And for the same kinds of reasons, people are prone to ignore the warnings of Scripture that tell us that Jesus is coming again and bringing judgment with Him. But for many years, and for various reasons, self-appointed authorities have been setting dates and predicting when this grand catastrophe was supposed to happen. They have been wrong 100% of the time so far. Furthermore, a vast array of conflicting ideas are presented about eschatology, the study of last times.

As a result, it is easy for us to become discouraged. Who should you believe? What should you believe? And furthermore, life’s circumstances become so burdensome that the last thing we want to do is think about Divine judgment of sinners. To that end, we hear much chatter about the need to stop talking about negative stuff and talk about positive stuff.

I guess we could say the same thing about the warning light on your vehicle that is trying to tell you your oil level is low. Checking the oil and adding more is just a bother. Disconnect the light and get on with life. That might seem like a pleasant, non-negative kind of response until the engine in your car goes up in smoke.

God gave us many warnings about His plans for the future. Granted, Divine judgment against real sinners is not exactly positive. But turning from sin, confessing sin, and repenting because we believe God is actually quite positive. That is the purpose for which God inspired servants like Paul to write these vivid and pertinent warnings about the Day of the Lord.

Times and Seasons (v.1).

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you (v.1). We live in times and seasons. These are words about time. The terms times and seasons are synonyms but yet are different. The Greek word for times is *chronos* which speaks of duration. Obviously, the Greek word gives us the English word for chronology, a period of time. Thus, the word as it is used in our text describes a period of time, the duration whether long or short.

The second word, seasons, is the Greek work *kairos*. It speaks of the characteristics of the particular time period. It describes what those time periods are like. In God’s plan, there are different kinds of times when He works differently in certain periods to accomplish His purposes. Sometimes those are called dispensations.

The two words are not relegated to ancient history. Times and seasons apply to us. On the one hand, our lives are made up of duration of time periods. Often we break those periods down into times like childhood, teens, young adult, middle-aged, and “on the

downward slope.” The important principle is that God is in control during all of them.

On the other hand, our lives are also made up of periods of time with particular characteristics. Each age period is identifiable by certain characteristics. Children act like children. Teens act like teens. And adults are supposed to act like adults. But that is not always the case.

The most important “*kiaros*” kind of time is when we acknowledge that God is our Father through faith in our Savior Jesus Christ. Hopefully you are living in that kind of time period now. Because we are living a life characterized by relationship with Christ, we can be encouraged. Our encouragement is settled on the firm knowledge that whatever happens in the future will be according to God’s predetermined design and under His complete control. That is a good character of this period of life.

Regarding those times, there are some things we just know. Therefore, Paul reminded his readers that *you have no need to have anything written to you (v. 1)*. Again, the wording intends to highlight the statement. The statement looks like another example of *paralipsis*, which is intended to call attention to something by claiming it is an unnecessary matter.

But here the emphasis is that it was unnecessary for Paul to write about how God works in time periods and dispensations because God has already spoken regarding last times. In other words, there was no new news on the matter when Paul wrote this letter. There would be a whole lot of new news about a half-century later when God inspired John to write the Revelation.

God had already clearly spoken through the Old Testament prophets about particular matters still to come in the last times. We see large sections of unfulfilled promises in Isaiah 40-66; Ezekiel 38-48; Daniel 7, 11b, 12; and Zechariah 5-14. In the New Testament, no one said more, wrote more about the end times than Jesus. In many of the New Testament epistles, there are statements like the one in our text that describe the Day of the LORD. But, especially Revelation 4-22 speak about these things. These are God’s words about times and seasons.

The Day of the Lord (v.2).

The particular issue at hand was the Day of the Lord. *For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night (v.2)*. The “Day of the Lord” idea refers to a special day for the Lord or about Him as it brings glory to Him by focusing on His majesty. In that sense, it is right to call the Sabbath a holy day of the Lord. God admonished His people through Isaiah, “*If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and **the holy day of the LORD** honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly*” (Isaiah 58:13).

That might be the same idea that is behind the New Testament phrase, “the Lord’s Day” John wrote, “*I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet*” (Revelation 1:10). That might have meant that John was in the Holy Spirit on Sunday, which had become the Lord’s Day. Or John might have meant that this revelation was one of those special days that displays God’s power.

Almost always the direct context of the Day of the Lord is God’s judgment against sin, whether the mention is in the Old or New Testament. *Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come (Isaiah 13:6)! Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it (Isaiah 13:9). That day is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, to avenge himself on his foes. The sword shall devour and be sated and drink its fill of their blood. For the Lord GOD of hosts holds a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates (Jeremiah 46:10)*.

The Day of the Lord might be just a day, but the term generally speaks of an era or a period of time. The Day of the Lord in this text could refer to the beginning of God’s display of glory at the rapture (snatching away) all the way through the establishing of the Millennial kingdom. That is an important idea to think about all through the study of this text.

Now it is good for us to apply the idea of the Day of the Lord to the circumstances in this letter to young Christians. In many ways,

the Day of the Lord already happened in the Old Testament. It was the Day of the Lord when God poured out judgment against Israel by Assyria and Judah by Babylon (Amos 5:18-20; Zephaniah 1:14). Then it was also the Day of the Lord when God used nations like the Medes against nations that abused Israel (Isaiah 13:6-9). God calls those events the Day of the Lord.

But there is also a future, a coming Day of the Lord promised in the Old Testament. It will be the Day of the Lord when God restores Israel through His judgment against the nations during the tribulation. Joel spoke of that future day (which we have not seen yet) as a day when, *The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes* (Joel 2:31). It will be the Day of the Lord when God heals the nation of Israel. God promised, *“I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners”* (Isaiah 57:18). Will God keep His promise? Yes.

Coming to the New Testament, we also discover that in some ways the Day of the Lord has already come to pass. The incarnation of God the Son was a day that declared the power and glory of God. Malachi’s promise probably has dual fulfillment. *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes”* (Malachi 4:5). Jesus explained that this Elijah promise was fulfilled by John the Baptist. But there will be two supernatural prophets during the Great Tribulation before Christ returns to establish His kingdom on earth. One of them will be a further fulfillment of this promise.

And, like the Old Testament, there are many future expressions of the Day of the Lord promised in the New Testament. All the amazing stuff Jesus promised in the Olivet Discourse will be part of the Day of the Lord. He said, *“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only”* (Matthew 24:36). The topic of our text is obviously part of the Day of the Lord. *For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night* (v.2). Peter promised that cataclysmic final judgment after the Tribulation, Millennium, and White Throne judgment which is also the Day of the Lord. *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and*

dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed (2 Peter 3:10).

Therefore, there is no doubt that the expression of the Day of the Lord that Paul taught about here was still future in his day. He said that *the day of the Lord will come* (v.2). Did this astonishing event take place between 58 and yesterday? Only if we spiritualize it and not interpret it as an actual event. Because it is still a future event, we are able to use this promise for our encouragement. In these two letters to the Thessalonians, we find repeated references to the Day of the Lord and repeated references to encourage each other with this truth.

Therefore encourage one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:18). *Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing* (1 Thessalonians 5:11). *Comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word* (2 Thessalonians 2:17).

But there is also necessary warning. The Day of the Lord will occur without warning. It comes *like a thief in the night*. Does this suddenness refer to the rapture or Christ’s return at the battle of Armageddon when He will set up His kingdom? If the Day of the Lord refers to the whole time period, the length of days from rapture to Millennial Kingdom, it could include both appearances of Christ. Surely the coming of Christ to snatch away the Church will be without warning or signs. But Jesus taught us in Matthew 24:4-28 many specific characteristics of the day before there ***will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man***, as He returns in glory to set up the kingdom. So that doesn’t seem like a thief-in-the-night kind of thing.

Sudden, Inescapable Destruction (v.3).

God promised that this great day will come in a time of peace. It will happen, *While people are saying, “There is peace and security”* (v.3a). Hmmm! That doesn’t seem like a likely trait during the Tribulation. Right away as Christ peals the seals from the title deed of Creation, amazing, catastrophic events begin to happen. There will be weeping and wailing in fear as people are *calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him*

who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb” (Revelation 6:16). That just doesn’t sound like people saying, “peace and security.” Neither is that a good description of the people when God destroys the financial power of the world. *And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out, “Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! For in a single hour she has been laid waste”* (Revelation 18:19). No, saying, “Peace and safety,” doesn’t sound like the kind of thing anyone will be saying during the Tribulation.

However, the peace and safety thing is a trait in today’s world. The leaders of our world, and especially our nation, have talked about peace all my life. No one seems to be able to make it happen. But they keep promising it. I find it interesting that new leadership and old newscasters are falling all over themselves in an attempt to convince us that they are all about peace and unity. And then immediately they enact dozens and dozens of new rules intended to alienate the millions of Americans who disagree with them. That is the peace and unity the Man of Sin will bring to the world. It will be pretty easy. Be identified with him by a mark and you can buy, sell, and live peacefully. Disagree and you will be beheaded.

The Day of the Lord will indeed be a time of painful destruction. *Then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman* (v.3b). Promise of destruction. After Christ snatches away the Church (dead and alive), the systematic destruction of the world begins.

It will begin suddenly. Some Bible students teach that this will begin three-and-a-half years after the rapture. However, the time between Revelation 5:14 to 6:1 seems to indicate that things happen in quick succession. And the destruction will not end suddenly but will last for seven years (Daniel 9:25). This judgment will not be the destruction of the people yet, but the destruction of their livelihood, the destruction of their well-being.

Paul gave us an illustration to help fill in the understanding. The coming Day of the Lord will be like a pregnant woman who knows that pain is coming at some point. Apart from inducing or c-section, the time when the pain begins will be a surprise.

This picture of the intensity of pain in childbirth is used in both the Old Testament and New Testament to illustrate human physical,

emotional pain, especially in response to God’s judgment. Speaking of the Day of the Lord (the context was mentioned earlier), God promised through Isaiah, *They will be dismayed: pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame* (Isaiah 13:8). Jesus described the judgment in similar terms saying, *“All these are but the beginning of the birth pains”* (Matthew 24:8).

There are three characteristics of the Day of the Lord hinted at here. Its suddenness, inevitability, and the helplessness of the victims. They will be helpless because there will be no escape (v.3c). There will be no escape from God’s all-inclusive judgment. During the outpouring of the judgments, no one will be exempt. At some point, some kind of judgment will touch everyone. Obviously, the sinners will be the target. But the Jews (who are also sinners, but God’s people) will also feel the brunt of judgment. Even people born again during the Tribulation (Jew and Gentile alike, Rev. 7:4,9). The recipients of judgment will not escape even through death. *And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them* (Revelation 9:6).

All of these truths lead to Paul’s affirmation that the Christians in Thessalonica did not miss the Day of the Lord. In the next letter, Paul taught the people that they did not miss this event. *Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come* (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). Apparently, they were confused about what he wrote in this text. The Day of the Lord will be too big to miss.

If we allow for the Day of the Lord to cover everything from the rapture through the Millennium (which will be great days for His glory), we can be encouraged to look forward to it. The idea of the great snatching away should not be viewed as a means to escape hardships of life. Rather, we rejoice because we will be at home with Christ. We rejoice because God will show Himself to be mighty and glorious. But at the same time, we are saddened by the thought of that great day beginning.

When the Day of the Lord begins, it signals the process of God purging the world of sin. The world is so thoroughly infected with sin that ultimately God will destroy it and make a new one. We, therefore, encourage each other toward the greatness of God and the display of majesty for His glory.