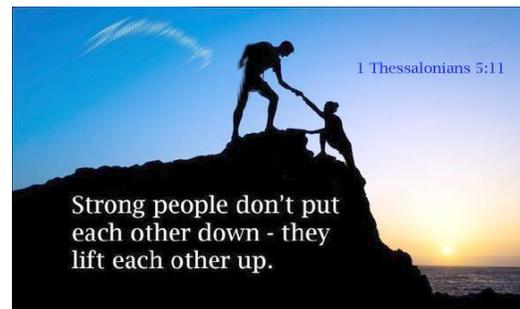


Judges 4:1-7

Psalm 123

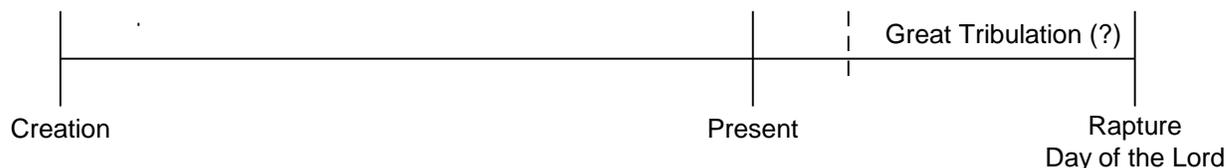
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Matthew 25: 14-30



THEREFORE ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

Our lessons at this time of the year begin to emphasize a time the Bible calls *the day of the Lord* (Isaiah 13:6 etc.). Life on earth as we know it will at some time come to a sudden and unexpected end. Last week we considered the “pre-tribulation” interpretation of Scripture, with the rapture (removal of the church and resurrection of the dead in Christ) happening *before* the great tribulation. This week we consider a “post-tribulation” interpretation, in which the rapture coincides with the end of the age as indicated in the time scale below. (The dashed line represents the “pre-tribulation” view of the rapture.)



The lessons this week, especially in Zephaniah and 1 Thessalonians, focus less on the rapture and more on the judgment and destruction that come finally at the end of the age – on the “day of the Lord.” *It is a day when the Lord's anger will be poured out. It is a day of terrible distress and anguish, a day of ruin and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, of clouds, blackness ... For the whole land will be devoured by the fire of his jealousy. He will make a terrifying end of all the people on earth.* (Zeph 1:16-18, NLT). These lessons help us understand why a loving God would bring such a terrible judgment upon his creation.

1 Thess 5:1-11. *But as to the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need to have anything written to you. ²For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³When people say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape. ⁴But you are not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. ⁸But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*¹

• *The day of the Lord* (v.2) is the bone of contention for those who debate the sequence of end-time events. The post-tribulation argument is that 5:1-10 follows after 4:13-18. (There were no chapter headings in the original letter), and therefore the day of the Lord must refer to the rapture, when the church and the dead in Christ rise to be with Christ (4:17). But this is also a time of *sudden destruction* (v.3) from which there is no escape. Therefore, the rapture of the church will be at the end of the age. So goes the argument.

The suddenness of the event (v.2-3), and the fact that many are not expecting the coming of the Lord, resemble the description Jesus gave his disciples in Matt 24:29-31: *“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”* (There is a similar description in Mark 13:24-27). If the

¹ Bible passages are from the RSV unless otherwise noted.

“gathering of the elect” coincides with the rapture we discussed with 1 Thess 4:13-18, then the rapture obviously comes after the tribulation Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24.

• *But you are not in darkness* (v.4). Paul wrote to the church, not to everyone. You can see his emphasis here. Whatever the sequence of events, we know three things are coming: (1) tribulation, (2) the coming of Jesus Christ to gather all who belong to him, who have repented and received him, and (3) the destruction of life on earth. Since we are *not in darkness* about these things, *let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober*, knowing these times are coming.

The breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of the hope of salvation (v.8), part of the armor of God in Eph 6:13-17, are the equipment you and I need daily, especially in these latter days.

• *For God has not destined us for wrath ...* (v.9). In the pre-tribulation view, this is taken to mean God will remove the church prior to the great tribulation. In the post-tribulation view, the saying simply says that those who persevere in faith will not suffer judgment and eternal death in the day of the Lord.

• *Therefore encourage one another and build one another up* (v.11). We had a similar saying in 1 Thess 4:18: “*Therefore comfort one another.*” In other words, Paul’s message in these two chapters is meant to *comfort* and *encourage* believers concerned and uncertain about death and times to yet to come. Some remarks by The Rev. Mark Meynell on these subjects seem especially relevant²:

Paul uses a very natural, unthreatening analogy for what has happened: sleep (1 Thess 4:13). Have you noticed how impossible it is to judge passing time while you’re asleep? Well, for those who have died in the faith, it’s as if they’re asleep and their next waking moment is with Christ face to face (4:14). Whether we’re asleep or awake, if we have put our trust in Christ, we’re completely safe.

Far more important than arguing about the precise details of this cosmic event (the rapture), however, is trusting that it will certainly happen. And the result will be glorious! “We will be with the Lord forever” (4:17). It’s not hard to be encouraged by that!

Regarding *the day of the Lord* and the final judgment of all mankind, the Bible is full of reminders from Genesis through Revelation. Today the wheat and tares are allowed to grow together. Tomorrow the wheat will be gathered and the tares burned. Sin and evil were never meant to exist at all, let alone forever. The parting of the two, or “last judgment.” is a common theme of prophecy. Here are a few examples:

- Isa 13:9-13. *Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it...*
- Obed 1:15. *For the day of the Lord is near upon all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you, your deeds shall return on your own head.*
- Zeph 1:14-18. *The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; ...* (Also 2:1-3).
- Zech 14:1-9. *Behold, a day of the Lord is coming...*
- Mal 4:5-6. “*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord ...*”
- 2 Pet 3:8-10. *... But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire...*

Whichever view of the “rapture” you hold, your choice is clear. If Jesus is your Savior and Lord, you can expect to be gathered to him when he returns. Everyone will be surprised by his coming, but for unbelievers who say, “*There is peace and security,*” (1 Thess 5:3 above), there will be great disappointment.

We don’t talk much these days about the Second Coming. Many don’t believe his promise to return in judgment, the way he said he would return. The Bible says, “*Scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions and saying, ‘Where is the promise of his coming?’*” (2 Pet 3:3-4).

God’s promise is that he has not destined us for wrath. He has destined us for salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, *so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him* (1 Thess 5:9-10 above). Jesus kept his promise to rise from the dead. Likewise, he will keep his promise to return in power and glory. Therefore, let us *encourage one another and build one another up*, as we await his coming.

² *Discovery Magazine* reading for Monday, November 6, 2017.