

Finding the Mission: Faithful to the End

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

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Good morning church! It is a blessing to see you today. We are blessed to have dodged another storm, but we need to continue praying for our neighbors to the west. This year continues to be crazy. But, thanks be to the Lord Jesus that he promises us that he will be with us until the end of the age.

I want to start off by asking a question. Have you ever been promised something, but no definitive timeline was given when you would receive it? And then, you have to wait with anticipation for it to actually come true? This happens all of the time, from small things to the bigger things in life.

I was thinking through this the other day and trying to come up with some examples for you and then one happened. My son came up to me and said, "Daddy can we throw the football outside?"

I said, "sure, but I need to finish working first and then we can go outside." So, he runs off, and about 5 minutes later, he comes back and says, "Daddy are you almost done?" "No," I reply, you need to wait. "But it's going to be dark when you get done. We won't have time, and then I'll have to take a bath and go to bed."

I said, "We will have time, just give me a few more minutes." "How many more minutes?" "I can't wait any longer. You said we could." "Yes but I didn't say when."

I asked a few church members for examples. One told me that she was promised marriage, but it took forever for a date to be set. Another told me his father promised he could get a motorcycle, but only after he could prove to be trustworthy.

Another told me she was promised a car, but only after the parent's could save up enough money. Another was promised a job promotion, but no definitive time was given as to when. So, he just had to wait.

In the waiting, lots of things can happen in the mind. You can get frustrated. You can get restless. You can start to worry that it may never happen. You can start to question the integrity of the one who gave the promise. This is especially true when what is promised is something you feel you really need.

Spiritually speaking, this is something we wrestle with often. God makes promises to us, but sometimes in the waiting for the promise to be fulfilled, we wonder how much longer or will it ever happen. Comfort in our grief. His presence in suffering. Reconciliation in a relationship

when you followed his plan for conflict resolution. Waiting for a promise to be fulfilled can be difficult.

Today, we are going to be looking at the greatest promise yet to be fulfilled for believers found in the book of First Thessalonians. The Apostle Paul came to the city of Thessalonica on his second missionary journey around AD 50. The city was the capital of Macedonia. It was a free city in the Roman empire, which meant that there was no Roman army stationed there. It was a melting pot of people because of the trade routes. It was prosperous and thriving.

There was also a relatively large Jewish presence, and they had their own temple. In the book of Acts, we learn that Paul went there and debated with the Jews at least three times about the death and resurrection of Christ. Some of them believed the gospel and joined Paul. Also, many devout Greek men and women believed and were added to the church.

Paul began to teach them and help them grow in their faith in the Lord as a church. But, the unbelieving Jews got so angry about this that they raised up a riot and eventually Paul had to leave the city. The new converts were now without their leader, and began to experience intense persecution: isolation, ostracism, and attacks from society.

Paul was so concerned about them that he sent Timothy to check on them regarding the strength of their faith. Timothy reported to Paul that the Thessalonians were remaining steadfast and faithful in the midst of intense opposition and persecution. Timothy also let him know that some Jews had been making false charges against him.

But, regarding the issue that we are looking at today, Timothy informed Paul that the church was anxious and had questions concerning the promise of the second coming of Jesus. And in the waiting, their anxieties, the imagining of scenarios, the questioning, the what-ifs, had led them to be discouraged.

So, Paul writes them a letter, 1 Thessalonians to address all of these issues, but he takes roughly two chapters to answer their questions and relieve their anxiety regarding the promise of the second coming.

The title of the message today is Faithful to the End. And, in a moment, we are going to start reading in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, but before we do I want to ask yourself this question, "Am I ready?" "Am I ready for Jesus to come again?" "In light of that, how can I be faithful to the end?" So, let's begin, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18,

1 Thess. 4:13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.

14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will...

I want to stop right there because these first couple of verses gives our first answer to the question, "How can I be faithful to the end?" You must first expect the return of the Lord

I. Expect the Return of the Lord (4:13-18; 5:1-3)

A. Your Expectations Must Be Informed By Truth (4:13-14)

I know it sounds basic, but you are not ready for the Lord's return if you don't have an expectation that he is coming again. But expectations must be informed by the truth. If we are ignorant of the truth of what is to come then our expectations will be skewed. And if we base our lives on skewed expectations, then we will miss the mark.

1. Ignorance Causes Problems (v. 13)

Paul wanted the church to be informed for this reason. Ignorance can cause problems. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul's second letter to church, we learn that some in the church had taken an overzealous approach, to the point that they had quit their jobs and were now dependent on others. It was causing conflict in the church and sending the wrong message to the world. (2 Thess. 3:11-12).

Ignorance also caused confusion because there appears to have been some false teaching on the subject, which led them to build their understanding of the end-times on speculation (2 Thess. 2:1-3).

As I said before, their ignorance also led to discouragement and grief because they were unsure what happened to their believing loved ones who passed away waiting for Christ to come back. So, for this, the Lord wants to inform us so that we can be hopeful. And he is not saying that we don't grieve when a loved one dies, but because we are informed, we do not grieve like those in the world who have hope.

2. The Gospel Validates the Promise (v. 14)

So, expectations must be formed by truth. We can't afford to be ignorant. But, Paul says, before you get into the details, you must realize that the foundation for the Promise of Christ's Return is the work that Jesus did on the cross. In other words, it is the Gospel that Validates the Promise of His return. Look at verse 14 again.

1 Thess. 4:14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe.....

So, the gospel validates the promise. Because we believe Jesus *did*...we can trust that he *will*. . We believe that through Jesus' death, our sins are forgiven, and our future is secure. And when that happens he raises us to new life. We are born again. So, physically our bodies will die, but

spiritually we will just go to sleep. That is why he uses the word sleep to describe those who have already died.

And then Jesus rose again. The resurrection provides the back-up, the verification for the promise that he will come again. I love the way one commentator said it:

The death of Christ *purchased* our redemption, but the resurrection of Christ *proves* our redemption.

If Jesus didn't die on the cross, and then rise again, then his return would be an empty promise. But the truth of this gospel message validates his promise.

B. Discover the Details of the Promise

So with that foundation laid we can now discover the details of the promise. I've located 9 truths just from these few verses. So, let's read the verses first and then I will list them for you.

14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

15 According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1 Thess. 5:1 Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

3 While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

So, here are some of the details of the promise of the second coming of Christ that comes straight from this passage. I want to also give you some supporting scriptures for them as well. The first one is that the Lord will descend from heaven.

1. The Lord Will Descend From Heaven (v. 16.)

Jesus himself will come down from where he has been--seated at the right hand of the Father. If you recall, after 40 days on earth in his resurrected body, Christ ascended to heaven right in front of his disciples. And as they watched with amazement, two angels appeared and said,

Acts 1:11 “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

2. The Lord Will Bring the Souls of Those “Asleep” (v. 14)

The second detail is that the Lord will bring the souls of those asleep. The Bible informs us that when a believer dies, his or her soul departs the body and goes to be with Jesus in Heaven. (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil 1:23).

2 Cor. 5:8 Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord.

And so in our text, in verse 14 we learn that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. The souls of believers who have died will accompany Jesus back to earth.

3. The Lord Will Make a Loud Entrance (v. 16)

The third detail is that the Lord's entrance will be incredibly loud. Christ will return visibly with a commanding shout. There will be an unmistakable call from an angel. There will be a trumpet blast, which has never been heard before.

4. The Lord Will Raise the Dead in Christ First (v. 16)

The fourth detail is that with this loud command, the dead in Christ will rise first. When Christ comes, there will be a great reunion in the air of the resurrected bodies from the graves with the souls that originally inhabited them. This truth is affirmed in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. It says in 1 Corinthians 15:52 that

1 Cor. 15:52 In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable,

5. The Lord Will Raise the Living in Christ (v. 17)

Then the fifth detail. The Lord Will Raise believers in Christ who are living at the time of the fulfillment of this promise. And Christ will unite and reunite the dead and the living in the air. Just as the dead will rise in their resurrected bodies, Paul also told the Corinthian church that those living would have their bodies transformed into their eternal bodies.

1 Cor. 15:52b and we will be changed. 53For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true:

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.” 55 “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

6. The Lord Will Take the Saints to Heaven (v. 17)

The sixth detail is that the Lord will then take all of the saints, those who have died and those currently living, to heaven with him. This was exactly what Jesus promised to his disciples after he told them that he would be leaving them. He said,

John 14:1 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2 My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

7. The Lord Will Give No Advanced Notice (5:1-2)

The seventh detail is that the Lord will give no advanced notice. Paul uses the illustration of the thief in the night to describe this. Just like a thief doesn’t give you advance notice that he is coming to rob you, Christ will come, and it will be a great surprise.

8. Unbelievers Will Experience Sudden Destruction (5:3)

The eighth detail is that unbelievers will experience sudden destruction. Paul likens it to the swift and sudden onset of labor pain that comes to a pregnant woman. And, at the time it happens, it says people will be saying “peace and safety.”

There are a few different views for what peace and safety could mean. But, what I take it to mean is that the world will be indifferent toward God, not taking his imminent judgment seriously, and having a false sense of security. The security is false because there is nothing but trust in the Lord Jesus that will deliver someone from the sudden destruction that will come.

9. Unbelievers Will Be Unable To Escape Destruction (5:3)

The ninth detail is that the unbelievers will be unable to escape this destruction. The Greek word used for destruction here has a more detailed meaning. It means “utter and hopeless ruin.” It is a loss of everything worthwhile, causing the victims to despair of life itself.

But, they will not be totally annihilated at this time. Instead, they are assigned to wrath and denied the privileges of salvation that the believers will enjoy. Unbelievers will suffer judgment. Christians will enter glory with Jesus.

It seems from the text that the return of Jesus will be a swift exodus for believers. But the day of the Lord's judgment upon unbelievers will be an extended period, not just a single event. We don't have time today to get into the details of that. But before we move on, I want to mention other important component of expecting the Lord's return

So, to get ready for the end, we need to expect that the Lord is coming back. Those expectations need to be informed by the truth, we need to discover the details of the promise, but we also don't need to waste time on what we don't know.

C. Don't Waste Time on What You Don't Know (5:1)

Dates and times have never been a part of God's revelation concerning the Second Coming. Jesus was clear with his disciples. In Matthew, he said,

Matt 24:36 "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Acts 1:7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.

Why is it better for you not to know. Think about it, if you knew the dates and times, and it were a couple hundred or thousand years in the future, what would happen? Human nature would take over and the urgency and passion for the mission of God would be stifled.

But, if the date were sure and it was a week from now, then the world would go crazy. We have seen glimpses of this with past predictions of Christ's return. Perhaps people would go on a sinning spree and then turn to Christ right before. The church would panic too which could lead to some rash decision making. Pastor Mark Howell from FBC Daytona Beach says it this way,

The Bible does not give dates and times, it gives a promise: Christ is coming. An *indifferent* church lacks motivation and a *panicked* church lacks peace. However, an *expectant* church is filled with passion.

We are in this series Finding the Mission of Christ. And this is exactly how the church of God should pursue its mission - with passion and expectancy. So, the challenge here is to not waste your time being consumed with the things that haven't been revealed about the end times.

Don't get so consumed with thoughts that the world could be coming to an end that you lose sight of, or your passion for, the mission of God.

That leads me to the next main point. How can we be faithful to the end? We first need to expect the second coming of Christ. But more importantly, we need to live the mission like he is coming soon.

II. Live the Mission Like He Is Coming Soon (5:4-11)

Live the Mission like he is coming soon. If we believe that Jesus is coming back and our expectations of the future are based on the truth of God's word, then that ought to shape how we live in the present. As we learned earlier in this series, the Lord Jesus gave us the mission of making disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded

And we need to be all in, passionately living out this mission like Jesus is Coming Soon. And our passage points to three things that we must do to live out the mission in this way. The first one in chapter 5:4-6:

1 Thess. 5:4 But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.

6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.

How do we live the mission like he is coming soon? Well, first we need to wake up!

A. Wake Up!

Christians are not in darkness. Folks, please hear this, you are not children of darkness. Those who are separated from God because of their sin, those who have not turned from their wickedness, and trusted in the Lord Jesus for salvation, those are the ones who are children of darkness.

But, you are not! You are not like the others, the unbelievers who are asleep. Before, Paul used sleep as a term for those who are physically dead. Now, he used sleep to mean those who are spiritually dead. He said, You are not like those who belong to the dark--those who sleep at night.

You belong to the day. You have been awakened by the light of Jesus Christ. But, the reality is that some of us are snoozing.

Any of you sleepwalkers? I am a sleepwalker. I've got some funny stories. My wife has some even funnier stories because she has witnessed them. I sleep-walked during my honeymoon. It

was the first night on our cruise ship, and I had a dream in which I woke up, looked out our cruise ship window, and coming right toward our window was another cruise ship.

So, while I am sleeping, I jump out of the bed and slam my hands on the bed and start yelling, "Get down!" "Get down!" Amy, who has been sleeping so soundly, springs up out of bed, and is freaking out thinking that we are about to die. So, she starts calling my name and finally I start to wake up, and of course I just crawl out of bed and go back to sleep. And she can't go back to sleep.

Another one happened when I was in college, I had a dream that I was taking all the hangup clothes out of my closet. But what I didn't realize is that I was actually doing it. I had taken all the clothes from my closet and had just thrown them all over the floor. Later I woke up, and it was morning, it was daylight. And I was standing in the middle of my room, holding my blanket just spinning in circles.

My brothers and sisters, we are children of the day...of light. But the problem is some of us are sleeping on watch. We are sleepwalking during the day, spinning around in circles, going nowhere. The Lord is telling us to Wake Up and Be alert. Jesus is coming back.

The Thessalonians were discouraged because of their uncertainties regarding the future. And the reality for us is that no matter how difficult our present circumstances might become, that we can face them with the promise of a secure future.

So, the days ahead can be bright, filled with purpose, full of hope if only you would be alert to walking in the light of Christ. How easy it is to simply drift off, and become comfortable and our hearts become insensitive to the Spirit. Just as drowsiness creeps up and weighs down the eyes, spiritual drowsiness slowly creeps up and paralyzes us spiritually.

Perhaps today is a heart check for you. Has the assembly of the church and fellowship with brothers and sisters become a bore to you. Have spiritual habits become chores. Have your prayers reduced in scope and frequency.

Perhaps today you need to ask the Lord to help you wake up and be alert once again--For him to renew your heart and awaken your spirit once again. If we desire to live the mission of Christ like he is coming soon, then we need to wake up, and secondly we must sober up.

B. Sober Up!

1 Thess. 5:8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

Paul says let us be sober. He was challenging them to be true to their first love--to let their lifestyle reflect their loyalty to Christ. You see, Waking Up means remembering your *standing* in

Christ. Sobering up deals with living it out--the practice of a serious faith. So, Wake up if you are a Christian. And, sober up so that you can get serious about living like it!

Remember, the Thessalonians had uncertainty regarding the end times which caused some to make irrational decisions. Some lost control of their senses when it came to balancing their future expectations with present obligations. Some were overwhelmed with an unhealthy anxiety because they thought their persecution indicated that God's Day of Judgement had already come and they missed it.

Some quit doing their part because of these reasons. Sober Up! Paul tells them, you're living like you are drunk. You need to be self-controlled. You need to discipline yourself for godliness and as Paul says, put on spiritual armor to continue preparing and living for the mission of Christ.

Think about this. How well would a soldier do if he went to battle drunk? No, when going to the battle, a good soldier will not be hindered by anything--he will make sure he is at his best, and that he has prepared to be his best. Part of that preparation is putting on armor.

For the Christian, the greatest vulnerabilities include the heart and the head. And Paul says that part of sobering up is putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. Faith, hope, and love make up three great defenses for the spiritual battle. Listen to the way one commentator explained this:

Faith reflects confidence. Love declares loyalty. Hope provides security. This trio of Christian virtues forms the essence of Christianity. Believe what God says by faith; do what God requires out of love; and trust what God promises because of hope.

We need to sober up as a church, and put on the armor of God so that we can be about the business of God in this world because at any moment we hope in the return of our Saviour. So may our minds and hearts be protected as we engage in the mission of Christ.

So we Wake Up, Sober Up, and finally Point Up

C. Point Up

9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

When the uncertainties, doubts, struggles, pain, or persecution cause discouragement for other believers, we are reminded to help each other by pointing up. We encourage each other and build each other up to press on toward the prize and finish our Christian race well because Jesus is coming back.

We don't have to worry about tomorrow, because whether we are awake or asleep, meaning, whether we live or die, God has appointed for us to receive salvation through Jesus Christ. We won't experience wrath on the Day of Judgement like those who don't believe. Because Jesus is coming back to take us home.

But how many people do you know who are not ready? How many do you know who will not be caught up in the air with Jesus on that day? The reality is, we have a limited opportunity to make a maximum impact now.

If we truly expect that Jesus is coming back because we believe the truth of his promise, then we need to live on mission like he is coming soon. The time is now for us to wake up, sober up, and point up. God desires for us to be faithful to the end, either the end of our lives, or the end of the age when Jesus returns. He is coming back! Are you ready?