

Sunday Update
15th November 2020

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

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 labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 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 alert and self-controlled. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 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.

I wonder what your prayers are at the moment. Given Covid and all that goes with it, what are you praying for yourself, for people you know and love, or for the world as a whole? What are you asking God to do? I suppose there are almost as many answers to that question as there are people, with all kinds of variations on a theme, whether our prayer is for Covid to end, or for a vaccine to be produced, or for us to have strength and grace to deal with everything we find difficult. Whatever the precise detail of the prayer, the big theme suggests that we are expecting God to intervene in some way or another. Maybe "expecting" is too strong a word for you; maybe it is more "hoping" that God will intervene, waiting patiently for God to do something to help us.

"The Day of the Lord" features in our reading today (in verse 2). Paul is not the first Bible writer to use that phrase, but it goes back at least 800 years, to be found in the writings of the prophet Amos. It must go back before Amos, when "the Day of the Lord" was seen by some as the day when the Lord would intervene in the affairs of His people to put Israel at the head of things, to make Israel the nation above all other nations. The Day of the Lord would be the day when the Lord would win a great battle on behalf of His people and all other nations would be put in their place. It also became the day when God Himself would appear and would be the great King of His people. By the time Amos and the other prophets were bringing the word of the Lord to the people, the note had changed: it would be a dark day, said Amos, a day when God would judge His people for their unfaithfulness, a day when the earth quakes and the heavens tremble, a day when the sun and moon are darkened and the stars lose their sparkle.

Paul says to the Thessalonians "*you know very well that the Day of the Lord will come*" (verse 2) The idea hasn't gone away, but now has a new centre and shape. For Paul, the Day of the Lord is the day when Jesus comes again to the world. That will be the day when God will intervene fully and finally in the affairs of the world, a day of great glory, a day when the new world will be created and things will be set right. Here is an old idea being given a new meaning, now centred on Jesus; He is the One who will come and when He comes in power and glory, the world will be changed forever. The Day of the Lord will be a very different coming of Jesus than His Bethlehem coming which was quiet and hidden; the Day of the Lord will be unmistakable in glory and power.

The apostle is following in Jesus' footsteps with this idea. Towards the end of His ministry, Jesus tells stories and gives other teaching and all of it features someone who will come to settle a situation. In

the parable of the talents, for example (in Matthew 25:14-30) Jesus tells of the man going on a journey who leaves his servants with money to look after on his behalf and when he returns he settles his accounts; 2 of the servants are commended for their diligence, the third condemned for his laziness. That comes in the middle of other pieces of Jesus' teaching about His coming again to the world. Paul has picked that up and reflects some of it in this letter to the Christians of Thessalonica. God will settle things with the world when Jesus comes again.

The one feature of Jesus' coming that both Jesus and Paul pick up is that it will be unexpected. Following Jesus, Paul says that the day will come *"like a thief in the night"*. The thief doesn't send you a message telling you that he will break into your house today; if he did you would be ready and waiting for him. Instead, he comes when you are least expecting him. Jesus' coming will be unexpected. It will be like a woman going into labour and again that is all about the unexpectedness of Jesus' coming; the pregnant woman knows that her child will be born, but has no idea when her waters will break and labour will begin; that's the reason why most have a bag just ready to grab on the way out of the house, no time to pack it then! Some people have spent a lot of time and energy working out and telling us when the world will end – there have even been some very precise predictions of dates and years – but all that Jesus tells us is that His coming will be unexpected; Paul says the same!

Don't you just love the phrase "people are saying..."! No? I'm not sure I do either! But Paul has it here: *"People are saying 'peace and safety'" (v.3)* This seems to have been a Roman Empire slogan to reassure people; "everything is OK; the peace will hold!" But it is a fake promise; it won't hold true. People are sleep-walking into disaster, but they are being told that everything is fine; they can carry on doing what they like and it won't matter. Now the Roman Empire was notorious for some very dark behaviour indeed; people did some unspeakable things in Ancient Rome, but the official line was "it's OK; peace and safety will prevail!". They couldn't care less about the way in which they lived and behaved; it didn't seem to matter! Yet the Christians are to be different; they are to be awake and alert; they are to live their lives well, ready for the Day of the Lord, walking in the light. Our world is not very different, with people often careless about their attitudes and behaviour. Our attitude is to be the same and these Christians in first-century Rome: we are to be awake to what is good and right and what pleases God, ready for the day when Jesus comes, living with Jesus as Lord and walking in the light.

One of our prayers might be "Come, Lord Jesus!" reflecting our hope and expectation of the Day of the Lord, Jesus return and the new heaven and new earth, when everything will be set right. God will appear with the ultimate intervention in the affairs of the world. Pray that God will help us be ready for that great and glorious day, whenever it comes, that we will take care over the way in which we live, awake and alert to what is good and right, ready to embrace the values of the Lord Jesus and to live in His ways. It is so easy to fall into the ways of the world, to be careless about our lives and the way in which we live them, thinking that it doesn't matter because "everything will turn out all right in the end, anyway!" Jesus story of the talents is about being accountable: how will we live? What have we done with our lives? Are we taking care to follow Jesus?

Prayer: Come, Lord Jesus; fulfil Your promises and our hopes; come in power and glory; set the world right and create Your new world. Lord, help us in the daily needs of our lives, for help and strength, for courage and hope, for friendship and love, for faith. Forgive us when we get things wrong, when we seem to love dark deeds rather than the light. May Your Spirit help us to be ready for the day when Jesus comes, walking in the light.

*Day by day, dear Lord of you
Three things I pray:
To see you more clearly,
To love you more dearly,
To follow you more nearly,
Day by day.*

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- For a nation which seems to love darkness rather than light, where people will say that “everything is OK”. Jesus called Himself the light of the world – open the hearts of many people to believe in Him and to share His values and live in Jesus’ ways.
- For effects of lockdown again, new measures and their impact; pray that they work to curb spread of Covid, let numbers go down again and people be safe; let our society be open again and let us be free from fear and anxiety.
- NHS staff as the numbers in hospital start to climb again; for care home staff such as Lorimer House, those caring in the community – God keep them safe.
- For the way we and others behave with regard to Covid, to be careful and not reckless; for people to be wise in the way we behave, to observe social distancing and to take notice of people who may be weaker and more vulnerable.
- Those still working from home – what does the future look like? Is this the way they will do their work from now on? Others deeply wishing they were back in an office; some facing a long prospect of this continuing into 2021; may they be healthy in body, mind and spirit.
- People whose hearts and minds are feeling “shut-in”; some coming to the end of furlough, going back to work; others having lost their job and feeling a lack of purpose in life; people for whom the physical lockdown is affecting their mental health and sense of well-being and freedom. For victims of domestic violence, with nowhere to escape to.
- For the virus to go away completely; pray that science will find a vaccine.
- Our community, caring for vulnerable people, helping those in need, for resilience and strength.
- Our political leaders, trying to make difficult decisions in the right way.
- For one another, sustaining our faith when there is nothing of the outward life of the church.
- People who are weak and vulnerable today, those who mourn, those who are sick, those who are isolated and lonely; those in hospital; those who are still shielding; pray for people you know by name.

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love; go and have a listen.

In Christ alone	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16KYvflc2bE
Blessed Assurance	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuyf1YQvcwY
King of Kings majesty	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5VutCGsVXE
Dear Lord and Father of mankind	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAXiN0egN-I
Christ be our light	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Y5N6oxIKHQ

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerjgpc@gmail.com

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.jgpc.org.uk

- If you have a smartphone, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS The next issue of “EVERY DAY WITH JESUS” Booklet for November and December 2020 is now available and please contact Ian Aitken for a copy. Also, new issues of the “WORD FOR TODAY” Booklet and “WORD 4u2TODAY” Booklet for Young People for November and December 2020 and January 2021 and “OUR DAILY BREAD” for December 2020 and January and February 2021 are also available and please contact Michael Merriman for a copy.. Let the Bible feed you.

Christmas Toys for the Salvation Army – we are planning to partner with Gorgie Salvation Army in their distribution of toys and gifts to children across the city, as we have done for a long while now. We can't hold a Gift Service as such, but here is the plan. Hall 3 will be open **from 10am-12noon on both Friday 20th and Saturday 21st November** to receive your gifts. You should come into the building by the East door outside the church office; there will be a one-way system in place, and you will be asked to leave by the West door. If there is a queue, please stay 2 metres apart and be patient with us. Please wear a face-mask at all times in the building. At some later stage Karen Reid will collect the toys and take them to Gorgie and hopefully she will join us in a Zoom service to say a word about the way in which they will use our gifts. They try to put a large gift and a small gift in each parcel, together with some chocolate or a selection box. Please leave your gift unwrapped but provide some wrapping paper with it.

Christmas cards and gifts sale – as you leave Hall 3, having left your gift for the Salvation Army, stop in Hall 2. On both Friday and Saturday, Jean will be there selling Christmas cards and gifts that are supported by Tearfund and Fairtrade. Again, we ask you to abide by the social distancing measures and wear a face-mask.

Coming, ready or not!

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

Prepare yourself...

We gather here, at the end of one week
and the beginning of another.
O Lord of decades and days,
centuries and seconds,
we stop now, for this moment,
and turn together to you –
who holds all time in your hand.
Make us ready to receive you,
as we gather here today.
Amen.



Question...



When have you been completely surprised by something or someone?

Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 . You can read them in a Bible or find them here: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thess%205%3A1-11&version=GNT>

You could try reading the verses in different versions to see if it adds to your understanding of the passage, or try this more active way of engaging with God's word:

Give each person a torch. When the passage talks about night turn off the torches. Stay in the darkness until the passage mentions children of light at which point turn the torches back on and notice the contrast between dark and light. How did it feel to be in the darkness compared to the light?

Talk together...



Paul reminds us to always remember to live as children of light.

- What do you think it means to be “children of light”?
- Do you feel differently about things when it’s dark – or when it’s light?
- Think about the things you have done or thought today – which were light? Were there any darkness?
- How do you feel about the idea of something coming like a “thief in the night”?
- How can you be a child of light this week?
- What are the absolute essentials to navigate life as a Christian?
- Whatever you chose, Paul gives three examples of what is needed: faith, love and hope. What can we learn from that?

Pray together...

Make the room as dark as possible and have one source of light available for everyone to see (eg. a candle, a lamp, a torch). Focus on the light and say a prayer asking God to help you be children of light this week. Ask him to help you shine light onto the lives of those you meet. Reflect on these words that Jesus spoke: “You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden...your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14, 16)

Praise together...



We are marching in the light of God:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yn16ABWn20c>

Pray...

Lord, help us to see the light,
Be the light,
And share the light.
Amen.

Play together...

Play a game of hide and seek (outside if the weather is nice enough!). Count to 30 then say, “Coming, ready or not!”

Act together...

Talk together about where you can see “darkness” in the world or in your community. For example those living in poverty. What might they need? How could you be “children of light” to those people? For example, could you donate some items to a local foodbank? Raise money for a charity? Buy fairtrade?

Do something...

Go for a walk when it’s dark outside. How many sources of light can you spot as you walk? (Remember to count any natural light sources you see as well!)