

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

1 THESSALONIANS LESSON 3 (Chapters 4-5)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Timothy Sparks and Ben Bailey.

Ben Bailey:

"I do not want you to be ignorant brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow to others who have no hope" (1 Thess.4:13). I'm Ben Bailey.

Timothy Sparks:

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Ben Bailey:

In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul is dealing with the Second Coming of Christ, which seems to be one of the problems with which the Christians in Thessalonica were struggling. From some of the things Paul says, it appears as if they might have asked him some questions such as, "Paul, what about our loved ones who have died? What has happened to them? Are we ever going to see them again? When they died, did they cease to exist? What about us? If they have gone to be with the Lord, what does that mean for us? Have we missed out?" Therefore, in this context Paul is going to present a unique discussion about the topic of the Second Coming of Christ, including how Christ will come, what it is going to be like, and why Christians need not worry. Paul begins in verse 13 by saying, "I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep [i.e., those who had already died], lest you sorrow as others who have no hope." The Christian might sorrow when a loved dies. That is quite natural; we all endure such sorrow. In John 11:35, when Jesus' friend Lazarus died, the text says, "Jesus wept." Sorrow is a natural response to death and grief. Even Christ felt it. But Paul says, "I do not want **you** to sorrow." Here is his point, "I do not want you to sorrow—as others who have no hope. Do not sorrow as if it is the end of the world. Do not sorrow like there is no afterlife. Do not sorrow like there is no hope of seeing your loved ones again." I am reminded of 1 Samuel, where David loses his infant son because of his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. The great king said, "He cannot come to me. I must go to him." There is the idea of the hope that Christians have. Paul sets up his discussion by reminding the Christians in Thessalonica that when someone dies, they need not sorrow like the rest of the world. But why is it that we should not sorrow like the rest of the world?

Timothy Sparks:

Paul makes it clear that Christians need not sorrow—**because we have hope**. Paul then explains the Second Coming.

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

When Paul says, “Comfort one another with these words,” he means “encourage one another.” Paul is giving them some **really** good news. Why? Because when Jesus comes again, He is going to receive those who belong to Him. Christ promised, “If I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, you may be also. And where I go, you know, and the way you know” (Jn. 14:3). Jesus is “the way, the truth and the life”(Jn. 14:6). No one comes to the Father except through Him. We learn from 1 Thessalonians 4 that when Christ returns, He is not going to step foot on this Earth again. Rather, the dead in Christ will rise first, and then the righteous who are still living will be caught up together with them in the clouds. Paul goes on to say, “Thus, we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17). These are words that we need to use to encourage and comfort one another, because we do not have to sorrow as those in the world who have no hope. **We** have the hope of eternal life, “which God, Who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Tit. 1:2). This is means for great rejoicing among Christians.

Ben Bailey:

Paul was dealing in this context with a prevalent false teaching. There is a prevalent false teaching in existence today, with which this text deals as well. Many people today believe in the so-called “Rapture,” and in the premillennial reign of Christ that is supposed to accompany it. You have probably seen it on a bumper sticker that says, “In case of the Rapture, this car will be unmanned.” The word “rapture” (which comes from a Latin term meaning to “kidnap”) cannot be found within Scripture. So what is the Rapture supposed to be? It has to do with the idea that all those who are God’s faithful people are going to “kidnaped” by Christ to meet Him in the air. Then, later, we are going to come back to the Earth for a reign by Christ of a thousand years’ duration. There is no place in the entire Bible that teaches the idea of a thousand-year reign. In fact, according to 2 Peter 3:9-12, when Christ comes again, the Earth and all that is on it is going to be burned up with a fervent heat. We are not ever going to step foot on the Earth again, because the Bible tells us that the Earth one day is going be destroyed. In Matthew 24:35, Jesus tells us, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.” While there are many who hold to the idea of the Rapture, we need to allow the Bible to be our guide. We need to ask: “What does **the Bible** say?” According to God’s Word, we are going to be caught up with the Lord in the air, to always be with Him (1 Thess. 4:17). There is no biblical passage which teaches that the Lord is **ever** coming back to the Earth itself, since it will be burned up with a fervent heat. Again, these are words that ought to comfort us, not discourage us. Suppose you have a loved one who died as a faithful child of God. This is the encouragement and the comfort that we as Christians have—the fact that we know that person is with the Lord, and that we are going to join him or her when the Lord comes. Those who have died are going to rise out of their graves to meet Christ in the air. Then, those who are alive will join them. What a great reunion that will be! Yes, these are words that encourage and comfort us. When we die, death is not the end. It is not annihilation. We do not cease to exist. We will live on after this life. If we are faithful children of God, we will be caught up with the Lord in the air to always be with Him.

Timothy Sparks:

In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3, Paul says,

“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves know perfectly, the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say ‘Peace and safety,’ then sudden destruction comes upon them as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.”

Paul makes it clear that while we **do not know** when Christ will come, we **do know** that His coming is inevitable. Paul says, “The day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.” Those who write in the paper, or who go on television or radio, to suggest that they know when Christ will return, are mistaken. A thief doesn’t call you at 10 minutes past 2:00 o’clock in the morning and say, “You’d better get ready, because I’m coming soon.” If “the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night,” then we obviously do not know **when** our Lord will come. Jesus Himself said that **no one knows** when He will return (Mk. 13:32). Thus, the exact time of the return of Christ is an unknown. Paul then talks about those who might say, “Peace and safety,” meaning, “Do not worry, because the Lord is not ever going to return.” In 2 Peter 3:4-10, Peter discussed those scoffers who asked, “Where is the promise of His coming?” Paul is addressing the same type of attitude here in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 when he writes, “When they say, ‘Peace and safety,’ then sudden destruction comes upon them as labor pains upon a pregnant woman.” The apostle’s point is that just as surely as a pregnant woman having labor pains is inevitable, so the Second Coming of Christ is likewise inevitable. Christ’s return **is** going to happen. When? We do not know. Paul is telling Christians that the only way to **be** ready is to **stay** ready.

Ben Bailey:

Although we do not know when Christ is going to return, God is not trying to trick us or fool us by withholding such information from us. Paul does not want people to think that God is “just waiting until the moment that they mess up,” and **that** is when Christ is going to return. In 1 Thessalonians 5:9, Paul tells us, “God did not appoint us to wrath, but to salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” He tells us that we must be sober, that whether we sleep or are awake, whether we are dead or alive, we must be aware of the fact that the day is coming when we are going to be called up to meet the Lord in the air. It is not as though God is “peeking around the corner,” waiting for us to mess up so, at that point in time, He can send Christ back. That is not the idea at all. God does not **want** to send us to Hell. Rather, He **wants** all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4-6). As Peter put it in 2 Peter 3:9, “God is not slack concerning His promises, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Why is this the case? It is because God wants to give people time. He wants people to have time to repent and to make their lives right. This is why Paul says that God “has not appointed you to be lost.” In fact God wants us to be saved. He wants us to be able to go to Heaven, and He has done everything possible to ensure that we can. Thus, Paul’s point is, “Be ready!” When it comes to the Second Coming of Christ, we may not know **when** it is going to be, but we do know that it is going to be **sudden**. It will happen quickly, like a thief coming in the night, or like labor pains upon a woman. It is something for which we need to be ready at any given moment. We must always be watchful, and ready in every way, as Jesus told His followers in Mark 13:35 when He said, “Watch, be ready, for you know not the hour when the Son of Man comes.” That is a lesson that we, too, need to take to heart.

Timothy Sparks:

In this passage, Paul also tells Christians how they can make sure that they are properly prepared, and how they can continually stay ready. He says, “Let us who are of the day be sober” (1 Thess. 5:8). Paul is using a figure of speech—“day and night.” The word “day” represents those who belong to God and who are following Jesus Christ. They are “sons of light.” The word “night” represents exactly the opposite—those who are workers of iniquity. We are not to be people of the night or of darkness. Rather, Paul says, “Let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love and as a helmet the hope of salvation.” Paul, in essence, is saying, “We belong to God. We are on God’s side, and He is on our side.” It may be that Paul is referring to Isaiah 59:17, where we learn that God arrayed Himself in a breastplate of righteousness and a helmet of salvation. We learn there, however, that God arrayed Himself in armor **against His own people**, because they were not doing right. But Paul is saying, “**Now**, though, we **are** God’s people, we are on His side. He is on our side. With God, we will valiantly conquer.” The message of 1 Thessalonians 5 is that we do not have to be caught unprepared when Jesus returns. God loves us so much that He gives us every opportunity to become His children, and to put on His armor (Eph. 6) so that we will be able to stand against the devil’s devices.

Ben Bailey:

God **wants** us to be ready. He **wants** us to win the battle and to be victorious in Jesus. When Paul talks about the Second Coming and about our preparation, his only motive is to encourage people to be ready. When the Lord does come, we are to be sober. We are to be alert. We are not to be like those who are “of the darkness.” Since we do not know when the Lord will come, we must be ready **always!** Then, in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, Paul discusses something else that Christians can do to help themselves be ready. Paul says, “We urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves.” In this context, he is talking about leaders in the church—known in the Bible as elders. We learn about their qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Peter, writing in 1 Peter 5, gives us some idea of their work and their role. Hebrews 13:17 tells us, “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.” In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul is saying, “You must recognize the men who have those qualities, and who have been duly appointed as elders in the church. Recognize their leadership qualities. Follow them—not based on **their** faith alone, but based instead on the fact that they are following the Word of God. Esteem them highly in love for their work’s sake. Paul tells us that there are some who are trying to “watch for our souls,” and who are trying to do what is right by us. We therefore need to follow them. Or, as Paul would say, “Imitate me, as I imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). We also need to imitate other faithful brethren (like elders) who imitate Christ.

Timothy Sparks:

Hebrews 13:7 makes it clear that we need to live in such a way that we do not make the elders’ job grievous for them. We should not be a burden to elders. We need to live so that their dealings with us can be joyous, not grief-filled. Paul, in his continuing encouragement and exhortation, tells the Christians in Thessalonica to do what they already know they need to do. He tells them in 1 Thessalonians 5:16, “Rejoice always.” This is not just a suggestion. We are to constantly be people who are in a state of rejoicing. Why? Because of the hope that awaits us in Heaven! This does not necessarily mean that we go around with a perpetual smile on our faces. The word “rejoice” means that we should go through

this life with a joy that is inexpressible. We should be filled with glory because, as Peter says, “We are receiving the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls” (1 Pet. 1:9). We can do what Paul wrote in Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say rejoice.” That, too, is a command—not a suggestion. **Everyone** who is in Christ is to rejoice because of their salvation, and because of the hope of Heaven that they enjoy. Jesus Himself, “Who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross...” (Heb. 12:2). If Jesus was able to rejoice when while He was enduring the cross, then we, too, can have joy. We, therefore, should “rejoice in the Lord.”

Ben Bailey:

In verse 17, Paul instructs the Christians in Thessalonica to “pray without ceasing.” He tells them, “Give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” Not only should we be a thankful, rejoicing people, but while we are rejoicing, we also ought to express thankfulness. The Bible teaches us repeatedly that we must be a prayerful, thankful people. As we pray, we ought to give thanksgiving to God for **all** the things He gives us. Prayer is one of the tools that Christians have to help them overcome both the devil and the world. Jesus said in Luke 18:1, “Men ought to pray always, and never lose heart.” If you get discouraged, downhearted, and depressed, what should you do? Turn to God in prayer; ask Him for His help. Why? “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man overcomes much” (Jas. 5:16). Jesus started His day with prayer before daylight (Mk. 1:35). He departed, went to a solitary place, and prayed. Jesus prayed to God to start off His day, and we ought to do the same thing—with thanksgiving to God. In Luke 17, we find the account of the ten lepers who came to Jesus. They were not supposed to approach anyone, but they knew Jesus was the Christ. They went to Him and called out to Him to heal them. Jesus **did** heal those sick men. But we learn in that same context that they all went away. One, as he was leaving, remembered that he should have been grateful. He therefore came back and thanked the Savior. Jesus then asked a haunting question: “Where are the nine?” What does that imply? It teaches quite clearly that God expects us to say “thank you” for all that He has done for us—for His love, His grace, His mercy, and the fact that He provides us with all the necessities of life. God expects us to be **grateful** people. Our prayer life ought to be more than just, “God, give me something else!” We ought to begin our prayers with thankfulness, and tell God exactly how thankful we really are. These are motives and actions that are intended to help the Christian make it through every day—and to eventually live in Heaven.

Timothy Sparks:

In Colossians 4:2, Paul unites prayer and thanksgiving when he writes, “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.” We are to be watchful in our prayers, with thanksgiving. In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul says, “In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” Are you humbly grateful, or are grumbly hateful? There’s a world of difference between the two. Some people go through life and grumble about everything. I have known some Christians who, it seems, must have been baptized in pickle juice—because they are so sour! This ought not to be. Christians, of all people on Earth, have **so many reasons to rejoice!** We have the sublime privilege of prayer. We can cast all our cares upon God, for He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). We can “ascend to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). We can do so from grateful and thankful hearts to the God Who loved us and to Jesus Who redeemed us. We can be thankful for the salvation He makes available to each and every one who will obey His voice, since He is “the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Heb. 5:9). We should rejoice always. We should pray without ceasing. In everything, we should give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for us.

Ben Bailey:

Paul now commands the Christians in Thessalonica to “prove all things. Hold fast to that which is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (vss. 21-22). Paul tells Christians, “You need to be testers of all things. Before you do anything, before you believe anything, before you experiment with or try anything, test it against the Word of God.” When the Bible says that we are to “prove all things,” what should we prove them against? In Acts 17:11, we see a good example of this. The text says, “The Bereans were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica.” How so? When they were taught, they “received it with all readiness,” yet “searched the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” They not only were ready to hear the Word of God and to do what it said, but they also searched the Scriptures to see if what they were being taught was true. So, to the Christians in Thessalonica who were confused about the Second Coming—to people who had perhaps gotten caught up in a variety of problems—Paul says, “You must ‘prove all things’ against God’s Word. If you find it to be true, then live by it, hold fast to it, and do not ever let it go.” This is crucially important, because in Romans 14:23 Paul wrote, “Whatever is not of faith is sin.” If we do not test it against God’s Word, if we are unsure about it, and yet if we do it anyway, that is a sin. It is sinful to do something—even if it is something that might be right—if it violates our conscience. That is not what God wants us to do. When I hear a particular teaching, what should I do? I should compare it to the Bible! When I am thinking about doing something in my life, what should I ask? I should ask, “What do the Scriptures say?” (Rom. 4:3). We must always test things against the standard of God’s Word. If we test something and we discover that it is not right, what should we do? “Abstain from every appearance of evil.” (vs. 22). So Christians must be people who test things against God’s Word, hold fast to that which is right, and abstain from that which is evil. Paul is saying here, “You cannot get close to sin and not get burned. You cannot have ‘just a little sin.’ Rather, you must abstain from **every** appearance of evil and every form of ungodliness.” It reminds me of Joseph. Potiphar’s wife was tempting him to have sexual relations with her. It got so intense on one occasion that she actually grabbed his clothes. What did Joseph do? He ran out of the house and left his clothes behind. That young man “abstained from every appearance of evil.” Christians today ought to flee youthful lusts, and, in fact, **any** type of lusts. Here in 1 Thessalonians 5, we find more encouragements from Paul to those in Thessalonica, and that we today need to take to heart as well.

Timothy Sparks:

In verse 23, Paul comes to the closing exhortation of the Book of 1 Thessalonians. Paul tells the Christians that his request is, “May the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That is our prayer for you today—that you will properly prepare your soul for eternity. Are you ready for the Judgment Day? You can become a Christian by believing in Jesus with all your heart, repenting of your sins, confessing that Jesus is God’s Son, being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and then live faithfully to Jesus Christ.

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR 1 THESSALONIANS LESSON 3 (CHAPTERS 4-5)

1. The Christians in Thessalonica were struggling with numerous problems. In chapter 4, what was the problem that Paul addressed specifically?
2. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13, Paul gave a reason for the discussion he was about to present. What was that reason?
3. What did Paul mean when he said that he did not want the Christians in Thessalonica to “sorrow as others who have no hope”?
4. According to 1 Thessalonians 4:16, what will be two of the first signals to people on Earth that the Lord is coming back?
5. When Paul wrote, about those who “shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord,” what is the implication of such teaching for the doctrine of premillennialism?
6. What does the word “rapture” mean in its original Latin root form?
7. What does the word “Rapture” mean in a religious context?
8. Where, in the Bible, is the concept of the Rapture found?
9. Where is the biblical passage which teaches that Christ will set foot on Earth at His Second Coming?
10. What was Paul’s point in comparing Christ’s Second Coming to the labor pains of a pregnant woman?
11. What did Paul mean when he wrote (in the context of Christ’s Second Coming) that “God did not appoint us to wrath, but to salvation” (1 Thess. 5:9)?
12. Explain the connection between 1 Thessalonians 5:9, 1 Timothy 2:4-6, and 2 Peter 3:9.
13. When Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:8, “Let us who are of the day be sober,” what did he mean by his phrase “of the day”?
14. In Isaiah 59:17, God is spoken of as donning armor. What was the point Isaiah was making?
15. In 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, Paul urged Christians to pay honor to someone. Of whom was he speaking?
16. Hebrews 12:2 speaks of Jesus as going to the cross “with joy.” Explain how that could have been possible.
17. Why are Christians commanded to “prove all things” (1 Thess. 5:21)?