

***“Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians —
‘We Are Not Appointed to Wrath, but to Obtain Salvation’”***

- ***Well, again, as I have said several times here on Sunday mornings, we are living in challenging times. For some, they may seem more challenging than ever experienced. For others, they do not compare at all. However, the message of the apostle here in the words we shall share together today are relevant, it is clear, to all of us today and always. Paul wrote over 19 centuries ago in his final letter that the "last days" would come and that they would be trying times indeed. So what we are enduring now is not "in essence" different from what believers have known down thorough the centuries.***

Last Time:

- ***The Rapture or Catching Up of the Church: It is Next on God's Calendar***
- ***The Rapture or Catching Up of the Church: Grace and the Tribulation are So Different!***
- ***Remember the background and context here. The occasion of the letter was that Paul had come to know that some of the believers in Thessalonica had died and the faith of the assembly had been significantly disrupted. False teachers had come into the assembly in Thessalonica and had led the believers astray as far as their faith and their expectations. So when some died before the Lord had returned and they had been called into heaven's glories, their faith was greatly shaken. So Paul needed to teach them again. He does that in chapter 4, verses 13-17:***

[READ] 1 Thess. 4:13-14 [Summarize]

13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive [and] remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we [all] ever be with the Lord. [“caught up” here == “raptuo” in Latin == “raptured”]

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

- ***Although Paul is not here giving any specifics as to when this longed for event will occur in reference to Israel's prophesied hope of resurrection and the fulfillment of their Kingdom hope, he is re-teaching what he had taught them before. What he writes here is surely relevant to our current day, a day when the Protestant churches are so often being led by those that are ignorant of Pauline doctrine regarding the rapture — and so much more.***
 - ***The teaching here is that those who had died were already with the Lord in spirit and that they would also be physically with the Lord FIRST, having been resurrected before those that still remained alive at the time of the Rapture event. This teaching directly addressed the believers concerns the greatest of which was it seems that those that had died would "miss out" on the Blessed Hope for which they had in some cases suffered and died. That is sobering, isn't it?***
- ***Then, based on these truths so important to our faith, the exhortation so relevant for believers living in trying times is found here in the next verse:***

1 Thess. 4:18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

- ***Great comfort from Christ himself through his chosen apostle is offered here through these words of the Lord. Taking by faith that which a false teacher has taught as some in Thessalonika had done is dangerous indeed, but reorienting one's faith through this teaching regarding the coming Rapture of the Church can easily cancel out the enemy's error.***

Our Outline Today:

- ***The Dispensational Contrasts between Grace and the Tribulation Are Like Night and Day!***
 - ***The Life of believers Living Under Grace Is Dramatically Different from Those Living in the Tribulation!***
- I. The Dispensational Contrasts between Grace and the Tribulation Are Like Night and Day!**
- ***Comfort and encouragement should characterize our lives today for we live under grace and not law and are receiving the abundance of his grace day by day and hour by hour. We are not living in the prophesied tribulation with the necessity of enduring until the end***

when the Lord shall return to earth and establish his Kingdom. Those were revelations given to the Jews regarding the coming Tribulation, but they are not given for us today. This is so important to understand and unless we rightly divide the Word of Truth we will remain ignorant of these precious things.

- ***The Rapture event MUST occur before the Lord God again turns his attention to Israel (see Rom. 11:26-27). Until the Lord returns his focus and work to the Jews, the church which is his Body is necessarily the Lord God's central focus. Even here in this very early letter Paul writes in ways that clearly communicate these dispensational principles. God's work with Israel and the Jews in the spotlight is a very different working of God than when the Gentiles and the Body of Christ are his primary focus.***

Then, when all the elect of this glorious and heavenly dispensation have been saved and caught up into heaven's glory to receive our eternal inheritance, the Time of Jacob's Trouble here on this earth will begin (Jer. 30:7).

- ***We have already looked at the introductory verses in this chapter, verses 1 through 8. Let's review again what is most important for us to understand in that section:***

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[READ] 1 Thess. 5:1-3

1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

[READ] 1 Thess. 5:4-8

4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

5 Ye are all the children [lit. "sons"] of light, and the children [lit. "sons"] of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

6 Therefore let us not sleep, as [do] others; but let us watch and be sober.

7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of

faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation **[the Rapture itself!]**.

This is not therefore a statement only about these believers being lights in the darkness or walking differently than others. Yes, they are being exhorted to be that and to do just that. But the larger implication here has to do with the day and the night. They are IN THE DAY AND ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DAY, NOT THE NIGHT! This is not due to their morality or even their maturity as believers. No, it is because of who they are. That makes all the difference Paul writes here.

- ***Here as always, CONTEXT IS IMPORTANT. This is therefore all about the Rapture or catching up of the Church which is his Body which is the subject in the previous chapter. It is NOT about the Second Coming and how then one must be prepared for that, watching for signs of the times, and then enduring to the end for salvation or otherwise being excluded from the coming Millennial Kingdom.***
- ***When we examine carefully the actual words and expressions used here, that becomes so very crystal clear:***
 - ***Verses 1 & 2: “times and seasons” and “the day of the Lord”:***
 - ***“times and seasons” - see Acts 1:1-7 for the only other use of this expression referring to the tribulation period, the second coming, and then, the kingdom.***
 - ***In other words, as Paul simply states here: “the day of the Lord”. This coming time is a time of great trial for Jews and for Israel and it will also be a time of great trial for the entire world. See also Zeph. 1:14-18; Zech. 14:1-9.***
 - ***Verses 3-4: “peace and safety”: The “peace and safety” phrase here will be reality at the very beginning of the Tribulation when peace and safety is finally declared by the world ruler (antichrist?).***

The first 3 1/2 years of the Tribulation until the mid-point of the Tribulation where the man of lawlessness is revealed openly will be a time that is so deceiving that even the Jews will be convinced to make a treaty with their arch enemies.

The exhortation for believers during those months will be to watch and be prepared and ready looking for the signs that will signify that the time is right to flee into the wilderness (See Matt. 24 & 25, Luke 21 and Rev. 12 for the very similar language regarding those final 3 1/2 years).

- ***“night” and “day”:*** Normally used of periods of time during the ordinary 24 hour solar day. But here “night” and “day” have very different characteristics. For the words are used here “dispensationally” and not only in reference to the sun’s presence or not.
- ***“them” and “us”:*** The ones living in the “night” compared with the ones who are “of” the day (verse 5). These are two totally distinctive groups. Again, this is dispensational teaching, not teaching about some believers who are obedient as opposed to others who are not, all living in the same time and circumstances as in the prophetic scriptures. Rather, it is about believers living in an entirely different dispensational setting.
- ***With this comparison the most important distinction of all is given, the way of life of the believer under grace described here with the words “watching” and “sleeping”. The one manner of living is honoring to the Lord and the other is not. One is appropriate for those living in the light and the other is not.***

II. The Life of believers Living Under Grace Is Dramatically Different from Those Living in the Tribulation!

[READ] 1 Thess. 5:9-11

9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

- ***We have now reached the main point of Paul’s teaching here in his first letter. The issue is one of hope and expectation. The believers in Thessalonica had been taught truth by Paul and their expectation was appropriate therefore for those living DURING GRACE and its***

abundance. But the false teachers had turned their lives upside down teaching a contrary view. Let's continue with the following verse to see how this "correctional" teaching finishes with the central truth he deemed so critical for their understanding:

- **Verse 9: "appointed to wrath" — Those living in the night, or in the day of the Lord have been "appointed unto wrath" meaning, to live in this period leading directly to the Second Coming of Israel's Messiah. This is called "The Time of Jacob's Trouble", you will recall. The Thessalonians, on the contrary, are "appointed not to wrath". This is as true today as it were then, whatever the false teachers are promoting more everywhere today.**
- **Verse 10: "wake" and "sleep" — This is the fundamental distinction that is so practically important for us all living under grace. Exhortations give to us living in this dispensation are based on facts, on truths that are secured by God's plan of redemption and promises given to us even "before" the foundation of the world. The exhortations are gracious in their very nature. This one we have considered today is one such and one that should change our living.**
- **The words used here are very important and need to be compared with the words used in other scriptures such as in chapter 4 of this letter:**
 - **καθεύδω - "sleep", a word never used of death, the opposite of watching (not κοιμάω as in 1 Thess. 4:15, a word that is used both of real, literal sleep and figuratively of death as in John 11:11). This is NOT the same word used of actual death found for example in 1 Thess. 4 three times or in 1 Cor. 15 where the mystery of the rapture is revealed.**
 - **γρηγορεύω - "watch", the most common word of exhortation in the scriptural teachings regarding the Tribulation period preceding the Second Coming of our Lord to earth and the establishing of the Millennial Kingdom.**

- **So WHETHER OR NOT WE ARE ALERT AND WATCHING OR NOT, WE SHALL BE LIVING WITH HIM ETERNALLY. AMEN AND AMEN. SUCH A WONDERFUL GRACIOUS EXHORTATION THIS IS!**

This is a teaching absolutely NOT true of the Jewish saints living in the Tribulation period. They WERE APPOINTED TO WRATH, THE TIME OF WRATH, and they were told that they had to endure to the end to be saved. The teachings by our Lord in the gospels so clearly testify of that. We could look at the book of Jeremiah to read more about that (see Jer. 30:7 and following), for that is the message of the Old Testament and the book of Revelation as well. You will remember the parables that teach accordingly, perhaps the most well known being the parable to the ten virgins.

- *This is highly relevant to today, is it not? Peace and safety! Well, there is none of that now but we surely all want it. Right? And we work hard for it. The enemy is very pleased to use our great efforts also for his glory if he can. In the Tribulation period he surely will use it to his great advantage. What about today? But the church which is his body is appointed a special working under grace and that is to continue until and only until its appointed end which is the rapture or catching up BEFORE the tribulation period begins. At that point God changes his focus from the Body church and grace to the Kingdom and Israel. There are so many today teaching otherwise and turning upside down the faith of believers. So many are looking for the signs of the times and trying to live as if they were in the Tribulation period.*

The Rapture or Catching Up of the Church is Next on God's Calendar — Comfort, not fear, is our grace gift for today. For we are living in the light and not in the darkness:

In summary, the Rapture or Blessed Hope is the final event in the Dispensation of the Grace of God. After that, the Lord God will refocus on his chosen people Israel, set aside during our current dispensation but then again the central focus of the scriptures of prophecy, including the Old Testament, our Lord's earthly ministry, and the book of Revelation. The time of light will end and the time of darkness will begin. The church will be gone and the nation of Israel will be the focus. Israel and Jerusalem will be the main focus indeed.

So the grace principle is at work here according to this passage culminating in vv. 10 & 11. The real issue today is not the enduring to the end of Matt. 24:13 but being motivated according to the riches of His grace as Paul states everywhere. Amen and amen. His abundant grace is so wonderful and transforming!