

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Without a vision the people perish. Again and again in human history and in our own experience that Bible saying is proved to be true.

Indeed, it's true that without hope we are less than human.

So, what are your hopes? What is perhaps your biggest hope?

What are you looking forward to most of all?

We live differently when we have a clear hope. Perhaps it's a wedding date that's been set, a new job we're going to begin; we're moving house very soon; we're about to finish high school; we're about to retire; we've been working hard to bring justice to someone who's been severely disadvantaged.

Whatever hope it is takes up much of our time, our energy, our money, our skills. We live now in the light of that big hope.

What about the hope of the return of Jesus?

In the creed each Sunday we declare to each other that Jesus Christ

“ascended to heaven and is seated on the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,

And his kingdom will have no end.”

What about the hope of the return of Jesus?

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Each year at this time we begin the season of Advent – a whole month in which our attention is fixed on that return in glory of the Lord Jesus Christ to judge the living and the dead.

What about the hope of the return of Jesus?

Only a few Sundays ago we read from the beginning of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians the definition of a Christian person as being one who *"has turned to God from idols, to serve the true and living God and to wait for his Son from heaven, Jesus – who rescues us from the coming wrath."*

What about the hope of the return of Jesus?

When you read the gospels and the letters you can't miss that both for the Lord Jesus and his apostles his return is a Big Deal. It's the great hope for the future. It's the great end point to which all of history is moving. And it makes a huge difference to life now.

What about the hope of the return of Jesus?

In our epistle reading we find reminders about three aspects of this hope, this "Day of the Lord" as it's called here; this day when he WILL return in glory to judge both the living and the dead.

Firstly, the Day Jesus returns will be sudden, unannounced and surprising: In verses 1 to 3 of 1 Thessalonians 5 we read: *About the times and the seasons: Brothers and sisters, you do not need anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. When they say, "Peace and*

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them, like labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

Thieving is a rotten business – stealing things that belong to others. It's devastating and insulting. But one thing thieves never do is tell you when they're going to rob you. They don't text you with the exact time and place. They don't ring you up and tell you. Suddenly, unannounced, surprisingly they do their dirty work.

Labour pains are expected, of course, but a mother never really knows when they'll hit her. It's almost always a surprise.

So with the return of Jesus – we'll suddenly hear the trumpet sound and the loud voice of the archangel and Jesus will be here.

Remind yourself next time you say the creed that he may come even before we get to the end of saying it – or in 1000 years time. Our hope for the future is real – but the return of Jesus will be sudden, unannounced and surprising.

Are you ready?

Secondly, with this Day of the Lord ahead of us, this Day of the Lord as our hope, we need to see we are

The People of the Day. Listen to verses 4 and 5:

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the dark, for this day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness.

In a sense, do you see he's saying that that Day will not surprise us. We won't be saying: "*I certainly didn't see that coming!*". We are in the know. We have listened to Jesus. Who promised he would return and take his disciples to be with him – for eternity.

We know that we are owned and defined by the future – and by the Lord of the future. The Lord who is majestic in holiness and whose holiness is the clothes we wear. The Lord who has ascended in glorious perfection as a human being and in whose glorious physical perfection we will share. We are defined by the Day when we will see him as he is and will be like him. When all sin in us and in this world will be gone. When there will be utter perfection that is almost unimaginable – and yet we will be with Jesus – in person.

And the implications?

Thirdly, we read that this certainty, this Day of the Lord Jesus is to drive our lives now. I'm going to read the whole of verses 6 – 11 in a moment but before I do I want us to notice one crucial thing. An absolutely essential and counter-intuitive truth. That is, as he says in verse 9 and 10, believers already know how they will be treated on that day: *For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.*

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

For believers, it's not a day of condemnation, but a day of salvation. It's not a day of uncertainty, but of clarity. It's not a day to fear but a Day to delight in. For believers, you see, understand that Jesus bore the condemnation we rightly and fully deserve when he died on the cross. That's what the cross is about. Jesus going to hell so those who trust him will not have to, like the hymn says:

"In my place condemned he stood

Sealed my pardon with his blood

Hallelujah! What a Saviour!"

Now listen to the implications – and be surprised! It can all be summarised by our old familiar friends, faith, hope and love:

Because the Saviour who died for us will return to judge all people, and because believers have been completely forgiven and there's nothing more we have to do to kind of "top up" that forgiveness –

Keep on living by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave himself up for us;

Keep on loving others selflessly like Jesus did;

Keep on being driven by the certain hope of his glorious return:

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

So then, let us not sleep, like the rest, but let us stay awake and be self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled and put on the armour of faith and love, and a helmet of the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.