

"Have You Been Snoozing?"

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First Things

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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:6-11

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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of 1 Thessalonians 5, a little bit toward the end of the New Testament. If you are here as a guest or a visitor, or maybe you haven't had the privilege of worshiping with us in some time, I want to welcome you kind of toward, shall we say, the end of the game of a journey through the book of 1 Thessalonians. Now, if you haven't been with us the last few weeks or months, that's okay. I'll catch you up to speed pretty quick. But one of the things that we're studying and one of the things that we're observing in 1 Thessalonians is how strategic and timely its message is for you and I today.

Now the reason it's so timely is this is the very first letter, the very first communication that the Lord gave us, the church, through whom we know as the Apostle Paul. Now you may be questioning why is the very first thing he gave us so timely today? It's because today some two millennia later, when we use the term Christian or Christianity, we would have to confess that doing so brings a multitude of opinions, preferences, expressions over time. We've had debates and divisions and councils and creeds. And so 1 Thessalonians allows us to kind of recapture who we were originally as the church called to be and we discover that here in 1 Thessalonians, there's an enormous amount of material, almost 20% of it today, in fact, is dedicated to what you and I know as the Second Coming. The reason this is important because the Bible prophesies in 1 Peter 5 that in the last days there will be those that scoff and mock and basically tell us that it is futile, it is worthless to even consider his Second Coming, and yet there is so much here in 1 Thessalonians regarding what we know as the Second Coming.

Today we're going to be in chapter 5, beginning in verse 6. The last two weeks, we began in chapter 4, verse 13, with this incredible passage that says there is coming a day where those who are dead in Christ, those who are alive in Christ will be caught up to be with the Lord forever. In fact, it says in verse 18 of chapter 4, wherefore, comfort one another with these words. Last week, we studied the first five verses of chapter 5 and it says that as believers in Jesus Christ, we are the children of day. We are not the children of night. We talked about signs and seasons and all these incredible prophecies of the Old Testament that are for a day to come, but not for what we would call the time of the "day." Today as we come to chapter 6, there's going to be kind of a change in the personal pronoun. Rather than talking about ye and they, those that are believers versus

non-believers, the Apostle Paul is going to use the word us. He's making it very personal today. What do we as believers, what can we expect, and how have we been called to live our lives in light of the fact that there is coming a day without notice that the Lord will call us home to be with him?

In verse 6 of chapter 5, it says,

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. 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.

So when we look at this passage in light of what we know as the Second Coming, I think there are a couple things, or actually three to be particular, that we need to discuss this morning. The first one is this: there is one people that are mentioned here beginning in verse 6. When he uses that term us, he's speaking as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Last week, we discussed the difference between believers and non-believers in light of the Second Coming. Today, he's only speaking to believers, those of us who've come to an understanding of our sin condition, and we've asked Jesus Christ alone to save us, those that we biblically, according to Acts 11:26, would label as "Christians."

But there's an important distinction I want to share with you. Here in this passage, it talked about, it warned us about being those that are sleeping. If you go back to chapter 4, verse 13, he talked about those that were "asleep in the Lord." I want to draw a very important distinction. There is a biblical word not only used here, but in John 11 and others, that when a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ passes from this life, it speaks of us being "asleep," but 2 Corinthians 5 says to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Here, in this passage, he's not talking about those that have "died in the Lord" and that are currently with the Lord, he's speaking about you and I that believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we wake up every day and we go through and we navigate life, however, metaphorically speaking, we are sleeping when it comes to our faith. So it's an important distinction. He's not talking about those that are deceased. He's talking about those of us who are alive, that is, we're going to talk about in just a moment, keep hitting the snooze button on the alarm clock.

There's two promises, though, in this passage and toward the end in verse 9, I want you to notice what it says, "For God has not appointed us to wrath but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." Those are two incredible promises that you and I have to "hang our lives on" when we talk about the Second Coming. Notice the first one: we are not appointed to wrath. We discussed this distinction last week. The Bible says in John 16:33 and other passages that as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we can not only expect, but we should expect, trouble, difficulty, tribulation, persecution. In fact, the first 300 years

of what we know as Christianity, the state sponsored 10 official waves of systematically trying to eradicate Christianity from planet earth and yet today, here we are, worshipping together. There are going to be trials. There are going to be tribulations. There are going to be persecutions. There are going to be difficulties. All these things. But we discussed there's a difference between persecution and the wrath of God.

When we speak about the wrath of God, we're talking about the judgment of God on those who have rebelled against him and those who have "rejected him," and this comes in two major aspects. Let's talk macro and then micro. Macro. This is what hell is, folks. Now we live in a world today where people don't want to use that word, but Jesus talked about it twice as much as he did heaven. And people talk about it all the time, "Boy, I'd love to go to hell one day. I just want to get away from God." I've got bad news for you. If you go to hell for all of eternity, you will experience for all eternity the wrath of God upon you. What does it say here? It says according to verse 9, it says that we don't have to worry about the wrath of God. In fact, Matthew 25:41, Jesus is talking about judgment. He talks about the lake of fire, that eternal condition of hell. He says it was prepared for the devil and his angels. In very brief synopsis: hell is long, hell is hot, and it was never made for you. We don't have to worry as believers about ever spending one millisecond in a place the Bible calls hell.

That's the macro picture. Let's talk the micro picture. There is a description toward the end of your Bible in the book of Revelation that the best way I can describe it is "hell on earth." In fact, there's biblical justification for that for it talks about in the book of Revelation, there's a day coming where these creatures come out of the bottomless pit, that's another Bible word for hell, and wreak havoc on humanity, the "wrath of God." What does it say here in this passage? He has not appointed us to wrath and so no matter how difficult the circumstances are, now no matter how much the persecution comes, though it may come from those horizontally out there, it is not going to "come from God himself." Hear me clearly: if you are a child of God, he is not going to pour his wrath on you, whether it be today or for all of eternity.

So what's the second promise? The hope of salvation. I've said this before, but I want to repeat myself because I think sometimes we need repetition. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, this world is all the hell you're ever going to know. Galatians 1:4 makes this statement, "He has delivered us from this present evil world." When it says there in verse 9, the hope of salvation, that's beyond the forgiveness of our sins, which is great, that is beyond having a relationship with the living God, that means that there's something better. That means this isn't all that there is because last time I checked, whether it's our houses, the land, our cars, or our bodies, you give it enough time, it is going to break down, fall apart, rust or crack. The hope of our salvation. You know, you read the last couple chapters of your Bible, it says that which is mortal will become immortal, that which is corruptible becomes incorruptible. It says that pain is gone, sorrow is no more, and that life is as we've always hoped and desired.

And so you look at those two promises. What we have to look for as believers is not the wrath of God but the hope of salvation, which leads us to verse 6. There's this very

strategic word there, "Therefore." Now those men that are part of our Tuesday morning Bible study know I say this on a repetitive basis, therefore is there for a reason. So how do we wake up every day, how do we live our lives in light of this reality that we're to be awake until his coming, knowing we won't experience his wrath and whatever's coming next on our behalf is greater than anything we could experience here?

It says, "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." There are three protocols, there are three modes of instruction there in verse 6 that I want to unpack for us this morning. The first thing it says, alright, it says do not sleep. Can I Southernese that for just a moment? Wake up is what it says. Get your head out of the sand. There's a lot of illustrations that we use in our life to basically slap us into some sensibility.

It says do not sleep. You know, in the book of Ephesians 5, it speaks about those who have navigated into a sleeping state, those who have put their head in the proverbial sand, those that have kind of checked out for just a moment. It says to wake up, and I want you to hear this phrase in Ephesians 5, "redeem the time." You know, you and I today, we have no idea, no idea when the Lord is going to call us home. The Bible says in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. We may think it will be a week, a month, year, 500 years, we don't know. The problem is, when we look at our perspective of Jesus' Second Coming, most of us are a whole lot like I am with a snooze button.

Now let me go ahead and share and be very transparent with you that in our home, Tracy and I, she goes to bed early and wakes up early. I go to bed late and I wish I could wake up late. Alright, that's kind of how things work. She sets an alarm, but rarely needs it. Oftentimes she gets up before the alarm even goes off. And then there's me. I want you to know, I think one of God's greatest gifts to humanity is the snooze button. Now just for, if you need to know, have you ever wondered why nine minutes? I mean, think about it, it's kind of a weird thing, right? Why do we get nine minutes? Why not 15? I mean, come on, how about 30? We get nine, it goes all the way back to the '50s when alarm clocks were mechanical in nature and they had a decision to make, do we put the snooze at 11 minutes or nine? For some reason, mechanically it couldn't be 10, but we get nine glorious minutes.

Now I love the snooze alarm, Tracy will testify. I'm not just a fan of hitting it once, I'm a fan of hitting it for about an hour. I like the snooze alarm. You know one of the reasons I love it? Is because when you hit it, to me, there is no better feeling than crawling back in bed and for some reason, I don't know why, but those nine glorious minutes seem to be the most vibrant of sleep. The depth of sleep, the dreams, I don't know what it is, I just love it. But here's the problem, is when we continue to hit that snooze button, we are technically missing out on the time/opportunity we have to "live that day."

Can I bring it back to scripture? How many of us, when it comes to Jesus' return, are hitting the snooze button? What I mean by that is this, "Lord, I know I need to get serious about some things, but snooze, I'll wait till the kids are grown. Snooze, I'll wait till my retirement looks the way I hoped it to," and in this economy, you might as well just throw the alarm clock out the window. It's not going to happen. "Snooze, I've got to get some

stuff done. Snooze until I feel better." Snooze, we hit that snooze button over and over and over again because we fall for the trap of thinking, "Well, it's been 2,000 years, surely it couldn't happen tomorrow?" But what does he say? Wake up and redeem the time.

So when we wake up, what do we do? It says, do not sleep, but watch. Now that's one of those words that is steeped in Old Testament truth and tradition. You go back in the Old Testament, particularly the people of Israel and the way that they set up their cities and communities, one of the most important, most valuable roles in all of Israel was an individual that we call the watchman. In the book of Isaiah, the book of Ezekiel, and a host of other passages, it talks about the value of this person who is on the wall for two main reasons. Reason number 1, to warn of the enemy encroaching upon the city. That's a valuable job. Whether it be miles out or however long it is, to warn those that are inside, "Hey, the enemy has encroached. He is coming. We need to prepare for the battle." But there's a second role of the watchman I think oftentimes we forget about. You do realize that not every wall is impenetrable. There are forces that given enough time and resources will make their way, they will penetrate the defenses of the city. The watchman had a perspective that nobody else had. When those forces would make their way through the walls, when they would make their way through the gates, and the battle would commence, they had a view that nobody else did. They were able to look down. They were able to give instruction. They were able to, it's kind of like those of you that are race fans, NASCAR, it's called a spotter. If you know what a spotter is, those guys that are driving 200 miles an hour around a track, they cannot see when that guy is coming up on them because of all the safety devices and such, they actually have someone at the highest point at the track who gives them a warning. "On your right, in three seconds, this car is coming."

That was the role of the watchman. The role of the watchman, when the battle came in, was to not only give warning, but to give instruction on how to navigate what's happening. Now here's what's interesting. If you were to look at our culture today, what would you portray this scenario, are you and I on the wall saying, hey, the enemy's headed our way, or are we in the middle of a battle every single day? We're in the middle of a battle every single day. In fact, if you go back to 1 Samuel 17, there's this famous story of David and Goliath. Most people don't read the first verse. It says that the Philistines pitched their tents in the valley of Elah. You say, "Well, why is that important?" Because the valley of Elah was Israel. It was their land. In other words, they had "come in the city." And I've got news for you, church: whether you like it or not, the world has entered your world. There used to be a day where you could set up a perimeter but today, through technology, through communication, it's here, and you and I have got to learn how do we navigate. The days of singing kumbaya around the campfires of church or long gone, church. You and I have got to figure out. We cannot stop it. It is here. So how do we have victory in the midst of a battle that's not just in our backyard, but it is in our lives?

I want you to see the third thing here in verse 6: be sober. Now, even though the illustration deals with the difference in sobriety and drunkenness, this isn't actually a

passage regarding that matter, but that is a message for another day, but we know what sobriety is. Sobriety means that you're alert. Sobriety means that you're paying attention. To use sports terms, when you're sober, your head's on a swivel. You're not blindsided by something. You're not taken off guard. You're not tripped up from behind. To be sober means to have all of your faculties working and operating to full capacity. Church, these are not the days to have our head in the proverbial sand. These are not the days to live in denial. These are the days where we must "wake up and sober up" to what's happening around us.

So what does it say to do once we're "sober"? Verse 8, "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." Now, if you go into Ephesians 5, you see what we call the armor of God. There in that passage, it speaks about the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and for our feet to be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. That's kind of the uniform we see. I find it intriguing here that only two of those elements are specifically mentioned, and they're mentioned in a way that gives us very specific detail. Breastplate and helmet. What do those two things cover? Your heart and your head. And in these days, we need our heart protected, and we need our head protected.

So how do we do it? Well, the Bible gives us instructions. What does it say about the breastplate of righteousness? It says, to do so, put on faith and love. Isn't that interesting, faith. You go to Hebrews 11:1, it says, faith is the evidence of things not seen, the hope of that which we long for. When we talk about faith, what we need to understand is this, that in these days that oftentimes seem so dark, so dreary, so depressing, sometimes the only thing, and by the way, it may be the only thing we need to hang on to is faith, knowing that there is a God that loves us unconditionally, and that he has prepared a place for us. I don't know about you, but I've become a bigger fan of John 14 every day I live, "For do you not know that I have prepared a place for you? For if it were not so, I would have told you, for I'm coming again to get you." In other words, this place is "not our home." The faith in knowing that Jesus has come, he's lived, he's died, he's raised from the dead, he's forgiven us, he's saved us, he's prepared a place for us, there are some days where that's all you've got, and guess what? That's really all you need. That will protect your heart. When your heart is broken by circumstances and struggles, the only thing that will protect it is faith, knowing that there is a God whose ways are above our ways, whose words are above our words, but somehow, somehow, he knows what he's doing, even if we don't know what we're doing.

Faith and love. The Bible word for love is not emotions, it's not feelings, it means putting others above yourself. You know, do you want to get in a spiral of life? Just think about me, myself, and I. That will send you down the drain of depression quicker than anything. I've got a friend of mine who, in "marriage counseling," uses this observation. He says, for those that are struggling, by the way, some of you might want to write this down. He says, if you're fighting among yourselves, the first thing you need to do is get more kids. You say, "More kids? I've got enough of those." No, he says you need to get more kids. You say, "You know, I don't want any more kids." He says, "Get more animals, get more dogs." People look at him like you're looking at me and say, "What is

he doing?" Because you know what he says? "The more mouths you have to feed, the less time you've got to think about yourself." Pretty good wisdom, isn't it?

You see, when the Bible says that we protect our heart by faith and love, one of the best ways to navigate these last days is not only to trust in the Lord, but to be more concerned about others than you are yourself. That'll protect your heart. Ah, but then there's your head because I don't know about you, but oftentimes my biggest battle is between my ears and what does it say here? In verse 8, it says, put on the helmet, the hope of salvation. I know that you know that for the last three years, we have walked through what many would call unprecedented days. I know it's a technicality and I know it's a "formality," but in the last week, those powers that be both here in this country and worldwide have supposedly declared that the pandemic, the emergency is over. Congratulations. The problem is the residuals of the pandemic may end up being more deadly than the pandemic itself. Did the pandemic bring sickness? Yes. Sorrow? Yes. Death? Yes. A whole lot of stuff. But you know what it left behind? It left behind possibly one of the most deadly weapons the enemy uses: hopelessness. When you have hope, you can walk through things you never thought you could get through. When you're hopeless, you can't move at all.

And if there's one thing that I have observed in recent days is that we have now a pandemic of hopelessness in our minds, believing that no matter what happens, it'll be taken out from under us. No matter where we go or what we do, it'll be ceased. It'll be stopped. In fact, as I observe humanity, you know, years ago, decades ago, probably longer than that, humanity has a history of, shall we say, non-biblical behavior. I'll just let you fill in the blank of what you consider that. But think about non-biblical behavior in days past. Is it rebellious? Absolutely. Is it the rejection of God's authority in your life? Of course. At times when we're younger, it's to "be contrary" to what our parents have guided us, the scriptures have guided us, authorities have guided us. A lot of times in days past, that behavior was a way of us "showing somebody up." But you know what's happening today? As I observe humanity, those same behaviors are being done for a different reason. Not to "rebel" and not to reject, but as a way of numbing the pain of hopelessness.

Hopelessness might be the worst thing that came out of the pandemic because when you're hopeless, you can't move. You can't function. You have no desire. You have no goals. What does it say? The hope of salvation. When you look at the world that is around us, when you look according to scripture, what is before us, as a believer in Jesus Christ, it is even easy for us to be hopeless. What's the point? Why bother? Why try? It's at those moments we need to make sure that breastplate is tight, we trust what God is doing in spite of what we don't see and we give and love others more than ourselves. It's at those moments where we "strap on our helmet" and we get in the game.

Anybody who's ever played the game of football will tell you that when it comes to the helmet, there are multiple ways of looking at this, but I'll close with these two. There are two adjustments on a helmet. There is the practice adjustment and there's the game adjustment. I see some of you guys nodding at me. You know exactly what I'm talking about. If you're just running through drills, your helmet's tight, but not too tight. And then

there comes that point in practice where some young guy pops you and you say, "Oh, okay," and what do you do? You ratchet down that helmet and say, "All right, we going here? Let's go there." I've got news for you, church: the enemy has popped us enough. It is time to ratchet the helmet and say, "I'm not going to give up hope. Jesus came, he lived, he died, he forgave me, he saved me, he's coming back. I am not going to let the enemy talk me out of any of that. I'm not going to let the enemy get me in despair or depression. I'm going to tighten that helmet and by God, I'm going to get through this until he comes back for me."

That, my friends, is how we quit hitting the snooze button. You hit that snooze button, you're going to get popped again. You hit that snooze button, you're going to go through it again. You've got to get up, tighten that helmet and say no matter what the enemy throws at me, 1 John 5:4 says, greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world. You and I have a choice. We can experience hope or we can go down the drain of hopelessness. It's your call.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. Today as we come, not only to this point in time in our service, we come to a point where we have to render a verdict on how we respond to the word of God, maybe today, no matter how you presented yourself on the outside, you walked in this place hopeless, in despair, on the brink or maybe in the depths of depression. Maybe today the word of God has given you the hope that you've been longing for all these days. Maybe you're that person today who said I've tried doing this, I've tried doing that, I've tried everything but Jesus. Maybe today is the day where according to Romans 10:13, you call on the name of the Lord. Our hope, your hope, my hope can only truly be found in him. If you're that person today who's ready to call out and cry out, let me encourage you this is a heart's cry. It's not about repeating a set of words. It's not about saying a certain set of words in a certain order, passing a test or checking off a box. This is your cry that you've got a sin condition that only Jesus can fix. If you're in that position today and you're desiring the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive you and save you, let me just encourage you to cry out and maybe your heart's cry would go something like this, "God today, I've got a sin problem. I have rebelled against you in a multitude of ways. And God, I believe what your word says, the wages, the result of my sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. And God that's what I'm trusting. I'm trusting that Jesus alone is enough to fix my sin problem. God, today I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he came on my behalf. He lived a sinless life on my behalf. God, I believe he paid the price for my sin on his cross. And God, today I believe that when he rose from the grave victorious, that he was able to forgive me and to save me and to give me that hope that we talked about today in your words. So God today, I don't have the answers and solutions to the world's problems, but I know that Jesus is the only answer to my sin problem. The best way I know how I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed, our eyes still closed, maybe today you're that individual who cried out, let me encourage you in a moment. I'm going to pray for us, we're going to stand and sing together and let me invite you just to step out and step forward. We've got a team set aside, a room set aside. We would love to pray with and for you and just

celebrate what God has done in your life. Maybe today you say, "Well pastor, I've got that covered." Maybe today's that day where you talk about following in believer's baptism. Or maybe you're that person, that couple, that family who the Lord is moving to become a part of this incredible body of believers. Or maybe today you just need to be prayed with or prayed for. Whatever the scenario, we're just grateful for the privilege of hearing and being a part of your life. Maybe today before I pray, it's not about stepping out and stepping forward, it's about stepping out of here in just a moment no longer stepping through life in hopelessness but in faith, love, and hope that God is going to take care of us, his children, no matter what befalls us in the days ahead.

Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, God, help us not just to believe, but help us to trust. Help us to know that even if it doesn't make sense to our ears or to our eyes or that which we can touch and we can feel that, God, your word is true and you know what you're doing. Help us today, God, whatever the decision, just to place our trust in you. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.