




Theme: Lighting the Way – Paul’s First Letters **“The Second Coming and Life Everlasting”**


Weekly Memory Verse:

⁵ *For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don’t belong to darkness and night.* –1 Thessalonians 5:5

Spiritual Formation or Family Activity Ideas for the Week: Encourage your family to give thanks for every day! Read Psalm 100. Create a Thanksgiving collage. Use colored poster board, some magazines, a few markers and some glue or tape. Have everyone draw pictures and write words showing what they are thankful for on the poster board. Add some cut-outs from magazines, too. Consider leaving blank spaces so family members can add onto it through the week. Write a verse or two of Psalm 100 on the poster board. Each day, thank God for all your blessings and celebrate that day!


Monday, October 4 – Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15 and Acts 1:9-11. From the beginning of the faith, Christians believed that the Jesus who came once in the incarnation was not gone forever but would return to earth. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, Luke had not yet written Acts, but the “we” in Acts 16:10 means he traveled with Paul. Believers must have regularly repeated the message he recorded in Acts 1. The Thessalonians’ question was not “Will Jesus return?” but rather, “When he does, will those who have died miss out?”


 Paul met violent hostility in Thessalonica (see Acts 17:1-5), and the same enemies may have killed some of that city’s Christians. Paul, like Jesus, spoke of them as having “fallen asleep” (see Luke 8:52-53 and John 11:11-13). He saw death as temporary, not permanent. N. T. Wright said he was teaching, “appropriate Christian grief, instead of the wild and hopeless mourning that typified pagan funerals.” What helps you to grieve, yes, but not, “like others who don’t have any hope”?

 Long before Christians wrote formal “creeds,” Paul used a simple, straightforward statement of their core faith: “we believe that Jesus died and rose.” That faith later moved the writer of the letter to the Hebrews to say that in dying and rising, Jesus “set free those who were held in slavery their entire lives by their fear of death,” (see Hebrews 2:15). When have you had reason to treasure that freedom from fear?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, the Psalmist wrote about your presence in, “the valley of the shadow of death.” Thank you for facing that valley before me, so that I can trust you when it casts its shadow over my life. Amen.*


Tuesday, October 5 – Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18. Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem became a sign that God didn’t delegate the work of saving the world to some lesser being but came in person. In the shadow of the cross, Jesus promised his followers, “My Father’s house has room to spare. If that weren’t the case, would I have told you that I’m going to prepare a place for you? When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me” (John 14:2-3). That was why Paul so confidently wrote, “The Lord himself will come.”


 Paul meant the phrase about the Lord “coming down” from heaven (as well as the “shout” and the “trumpet blast”) poetically, not literally. In Colossians 3:4 he spoke about when Christ “is revealed”. The central point for Paul, as for Jesus in John 14, was that we will always be with the Lord. Is that the eternal reward that you most hope for?

 Scholar William Barclay wrote of these verses, “In life and in death the Christian is in Christ and that is a union which nothing can break.” John wrote at the end of his first letter, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of God’s Son so that you can know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Can you trust that only a willful choice on your part to reject God’s love could break your eternal union with Christ, that you never have to worry about God changing his mind?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank you for the wonderful, comforting promise Paul shared with the Thessalonians. I look forward to being with you, and all those who love you, forever. Amen.*

Wednesday, October 6 – Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4 and Matthew 24:36 and 42. 1 Thessalonians was, many scholars believe, the earliest written New Testament document. But it clearly reflected Jesus’ teaching as the gospels later recorded it. Matthew 24 said that when Jesus told his disciples the Temple would not stand forever, they asked a very human question: “Tell us, when will these things happen?” they asked in Matthew 24:3. As today’s reading showed, Jesus said, in effect, that was the wrong question. Paul taught the Thessalonians the same thing in verse 1 of chapter 5.

 Too often our “when” questions about Jesus’ coming reflect the idea that if we just knew when, we’d know when to “get serious” about growing our spiritual commitment to “be ready” to meet the Savior. Paul, following Jesus, said readiness is not a short-term, emergency project, but a matter of living continually in the light of God’s grace and love. Do you live today, and every day, as someone who is not “in darkness”?

 Jesus redirects attention away from when the end is coming, toward how to live every day in anticipation of the end. Since his followers don’t know when the day of the Lord will occur, they must maintain constant faithfulness, that is, living according to Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:31-46. Could it be that Jesus’ return is not a fixed date marked on some heavenly calendar, but at least in part depends on how people respond to Jesus’ call on their lives?

Prayer: *Lord God, you are with me every day in the Holy Spirit’s presence. Open my heart to live with you now the same way I want to live with you when Jesus comes back to this earth. Amen.*

Thursday, October 7 – Read 1 Thessalonians 5:5-8 and Ephesians 6:11-17. 1 Thessalonians showed how, even before the gospels took their written form, the apostles taught what

Jesus taught. It also previewed key ideas expressed more fully in later letters. Ephesians took the 1 Thessalonians image of the spiritual ideals by which Christians live as armor for our hearts and minds and expanded it to a full-blown metaphor based on what Roman soldiers, some of whom guarded Paul during his imprisonments, wore.

🔥 Paul began this letter praising the Thessalonians for their faith, hope and love, like in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and 1 Corinthians 13:13. As he neared the end of his message, he returned to those central spiritual qualities as the “armor” they could depend on to protect their life as children of light, not darkness. How has this pandemic season strengthened or weakened those qualities in your life?

🔥 Again, Paul was not writing cheery clichés. Yesterday, we read in 1 Thessalonians 5:3, that he wrote that some said, “There is peace and security.” N. T. Wright wrote, “The slogan ‘peace and security’ was one of the comforting phrases that the Roman empire put out, to reassure its inhabitants around the Mediterranean that the famous ‘Roman peace’... would hold without problems. That is what Paul is really attacking... Within 20 years of this letter, the warning had come true.” How, as a child of the light, can you avoid putting your deepest trust in any human entity?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, keep teaching me that being a person of your light is not mainly about denouncing evil but about living with faith, hope and, above all, love. Fill me with that light. Amen.*

Friday, October 8 – Read Luke 21:27-28 and 2 Peter 3:3-14. 1 Thessalonians made it plain that the Thessalonian Christians and Paul himself expected Jesus to return to earth very soon. His words in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 point to this, “we who are living and still around.” After 2000 years, we can see that their sense of God’s time scale was a bit too short. The “when” question has never been helpful, as both Luke’s and Peter’s teaching recognized. Crucial to thinking about Jesus’ coming is not “when,” but “who”—who is coming? And who will be ready to greet him?


🔥 Jesus used Old Testament prophetic language to describe the end. People would feel confusion, dismay, and fear as everything seemed to be falling apart, he said. But not his followers! For them and us, the end of the world is not cause for fear but for hope because the words, “Your redemption is near.” When you think of Jesus’ coming, can you “raise your head” and rejoice in God’s coming redemption?

🔥 2 Peter 3 said “scoffers” say about the hope of God making all things new: “nothing has changed—not since the beginning of creation.” Can you dare to dream that it’s true, that God will, “make all things new,” as we read in Revelation 21:5? In what day-to-day ways does hope to change your life for the better? How hard is it for you to keep believing and trusting given the pace of what Madeleine L’Engle called God’s, “vast, patiently waiting love”?

Prayer: *O Lord, of course Paul and the early Christians wanted you to make the Roman world new! Of course, I want you to make the world I live in new! Help me keep trusting that you will, but in your time, not mine. Amen.*

Saturday, October 9 – Read 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11. Remember Paul’s statement of core Christian faith in 1 Thessalonians 4:14, “we believe that Jesus died and rose”? God’s intention

for us, he said, has always been, “salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” And how did God act to make that possible? We can write massive volumes analyzing all the dimensions of God’s action, yet Paul summarized it in the simple phrase, “Jesus died for us.” Jesus already fought and won the crucial battle against hatred, evil and death. The issue now is not can we defeat evil—Jesus already did that. All that remains is for us to choose whether we wish to be “in Christ” and share in that victory. And we get to do that together, “encouraging each other and building each other up.” Then, whenever Jesus comes, “we will live together with him.”

 Scholar William Barclay wrote in his commentary on Philipians, Colossians, and Thessalonians these moving words about Paul’s closing message, “[People] were anxious to know when that day would come. Jesus himself bluntly said no one knew when that day or hour would be, that even he did not know and only God knew (see Mark 13:32; cp. Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:7). But that did not stop people speculating, as indeed they still do, though it is surely almost blasphemous that men should seek for knowledge which was denied even to Jesus ... only [one] who lives in the dark and whose deeds are evil will be caught unprepared. The Christian lives in the light and no matter when that day comes, if he is watchful and sober, it will find him ready. Waking or sleeping, the Christian is living already with Christ and is therefore always prepared... The [person] who has lived all his life with Christ is never unprepared to enter his nearer presence.” How are you living, and helping others to live, prepared to meet Jesus?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank you that the Christians in Thessalonica asked Paul about your coming. 2000 years later, his answers speak to my heart, and help me know how to meet you trusting in your goodness, not my own. Amen.*