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

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber on...  
October 2-3, 2021

**Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

**Weekly Memory Verse:**

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

**VIDEO      Sermon Bumper**

**SLIDE      “The Second Coming and Life Everlasting”**

It seems like in every generation has an obsession with the end of the world or the end times or what they will be like. Just this week I found these quotes being bandied around the world wide web, reminders of how fixated we can become with things as humans:

**SLIDE      If a zombie apocalypse were to happen in Vegas would it stay in Vegas?**

**SLIDE      “Don’t wake me for the end of the world unless it has very good**

**special effects.” — Roger Zelazny**

**SLIDE “In 5-billion years the Sun will expand & engulf our orbit as the charred ember that was once Earth vaporizes. Have a nice day.” – Neil Degrasse Tyson**

Today, we continue in a sermon series on one of the first documents in your New Testament, the letter of Paul we know as 1 Thessalonians. Let’s remember that most scholars believe that this one of the earliest letters we have, written around 50 A.D., about 20 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus and 20 years before the first Gospel. This letter is only around two pages long on 8.5 x 11 paper with 12-point font, yet it has powerful and profound words for us today.

We learned that Paul was writing to the Thessalonians because he had started this church and only spent a few months with them before he had to leave in the middle of the night. There was opposition and his life was in danger from a group up thugs hired to harass him and those early followers of Jesus. Many of them are arrested and persecuted for following Jesus as Lord and King, so Paul writes this letter after fleeing to Corinth to encourage them after hearing from his protégé Timothy that they are holding onto their faith.

Timothy also must have told Paul about the death of one of their church members. When we get to chapter 4, Paul begins to talk about death and is clearly trying to help this early church with their grief. Paul is going to talk about what happens we die and the second coming of Christ, including what many refer to as the “end times.” Most of us find these topics interesting and sometimes they even consume us, like when we have a pandemic, or a tumultuous election season, or conflicts around masks and vaccines, and we wonder if this is a sign that the end is near! What we read in Paul’s letter today I think is meant to speak to us about each of these things and how we, as people of faith, might come to be

people who light the way in dark moments, which is the theme for this series of sermons.

Here is what we read in 1 Thessalonians 4.

## **BIBLE**

**<sup>13</sup> And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope.**

First, notice what Paul is NOT saying. Paul never says that we should not grieve. I often quote this at funerals, and I remind people that grieving is a good thing because it means we loved that person, and they are a gift that we miss. The more we love, the more we grieve. This is part of being human. What Paul does want to make clear is that we do not grieve as people with no hope.

In the Greco-Roman world, people had differing views of what happens when we die. Some didn't believe there was an afterlife. Many who did believe in the afterlife, believed that unless you were highly virtuous, what happened next was not a good place! With rare exceptions, we would go to a place that was dark and unpleasant. If you were evil in this world, you would go to a place of terrible torture. They didn't have a lot of hope or the afterlife, which is why Paul didn't want them to grieve like those in the Greco-Roman world. He goes on to reiterate what that looks like and why we have hope in the next few verses.

## **BIBLE**

**<sup>14</sup> For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died.**

Sometimes, we have read Scriptures like this, and we get confused about what happens right after we die. Do we go to sleep until Jesus

returns? While it might seem that way from this text, this is not what Paul believed. The belief both for Jews and Christians in the first century was that immediately after we die, we go to what is called Sheol in the Jewish language or Hades in Greek. They both mean, “Place of the dead.”

**SLIDE                    Sheol, Hades = “place of the dead”**

In this place there was judgment for each person and there were two options.

**SLIDE                    Gehenna was a place of torture and judgement**

**GRAPHIC                Valley of Gehenna**

All the descriptions we have of this place are unpleasant and metaphorically speaking, it is a very bad place. The Valley of Gehenna that you see pictured here is in Jerusalem and is a physical place where some of the ancient kings of Israel sacrificed their children using fire, which is where we get that literal term, “the flames of hell.” The idea is that this is a place that we want to avoid because there is death and pain and destruction.

**SLIDE                    Paradise = “the King’s Garden”**

The other destinations much more desirable, and we call it paradise, which literally means in Persian, “The king’s garden.” Kings would have beautiful gardens with water features and exotic animals. There was luscious fruit and plenty to eat. When a king wanted to bestow something special on to one of their servants, they would invite them to their garden. God is seen as the King and paradise is that garden in which we spend eternity with God with everything beautiful and lush, just like it was in the beginning in Genesis. Paradise is restored through the death and resurrection of Jesus, which is why the gospel of John describes Jesus’ burial in a garden and why Mary mistakes Jesus for the gardener. The idea is that we experience paradise with God forever if we live a just and

righteous life.

We find these images throughout the Old and New Testament, and in the words of Jesus. You might remember this story in Luke 16 where Jesus tells about Lazarus and the rich man. Remember that this is a parable and not a true story, but it makes a powerful point.

## **BIBLE**

**<sup>19</sup> Jesus said, “There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed in purple and fine linen and who lived each day in luxury. <sup>20</sup> At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. <sup>21</sup> As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man’s table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores.**

**<sup>22</sup> “Finally, the poor man died and was carried by the angels to sit beside Abraham at the heavenly banquet. The rich man also died and was buried, <sup>23</sup> and he went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Abraham in the far distance with Lazarus at his side.**

**<sup>24</sup> “The rich man shouted, ‘Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am in anguish in these flames.’**

**<sup>25</sup> “But Abraham said to him, ‘Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish. <sup>26</sup> And besides, there is a great chasm separating us. No one can cross over to you from here, and no one can cross over to us from there.’**

**<sup>27</sup> “Then the rich man said, ‘Please, Father Abraham, at least send him to my father’s home. <sup>28</sup> For I have five brothers, and I want him to warn them so they don’t end up in this place of torment.’**

**<sup>29</sup> “But Abraham said, ‘Moses and the prophets have warned them.**

**Your brothers can read what they wrote.'**

**<sup>30</sup> "The rich man replied, 'No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will repent of their sins and turn to God.'**

**<sup>31</sup> "But Abraham said, 'If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"**

That last line is a foreshadowing of the death of Jesus and his resurrection. This is how Jews conceived this idea in the first century and it is how Christians thought about the afterlife as well. After judgment in Sheol or Hades, one would either go to Gehenna or Paradise. You also find Jesus speaking about this and living out when he is on the cross in Luke 23.

## **BIBLE**

**<sup>39</sup> One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you're at it!"**

**<sup>40</sup> But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? <sup>41</sup> We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." <sup>42</sup> Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."**

**<sup>43</sup> And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."**

Jesus restores paradise with his death and resurrection, and he invites us to join him there immediate after we die, just as he did this criminal on the cross. This is one of the places I turned to in order to remind myself and others that we don't go to sleep after we die, but we are immediately in the King's Gardens with the King of Kings and the Lord of lords.

We often think in the same terms, that when we die, we either are with God forever in paradise or heaven, or we experience hell, Gehenna, and eternal judgment. I actually do not believe God sends us to one of the places, but we get to choose. If we choose to go to paradise then we will be in that place where we choose to do God's will forever and I don't think God makes any of us do his will. We pray in the Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," and the idea is that God's will is done in heaven all the time. There are some people who are not interested in doing God's will now or for eternity and I think we make a choice. I love how CS Lewis describes this.

**GRAPHIC            The doors of hell are locked from the inside.**

The idea that no one in hell wants to worship the one true God but would rather continue to live life on their own terms. I don't think anyone God will force paradise on anyone. Every metaphor breaks down at some point, but this idea is clear in the Scriptures that there is Paradise and Gehenna. The Scriptures go on to also talk about not just when our life and but the end of days when Jesus will return. The Second Coming of Christ is the idea that one day Jesus will return.

Jesus came as King to teach and show us the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus suffers on the cross and prays for sinners, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He dies and is buried, and it seems like the end, but on the third day Jesus is resurrected from the grave, as God's way of saying, "Evil, hate, sin and death never have the final word." The resurrection of Jesus is God's definitive word to us that there is always hope and the worst thing is never the last thing.

Jesus also promised that he would come back, and that his ascension to heaven after his resurrection would not be the end of his story. Paul talks about this idea of the second coming in his letter to the Thessalonians. The idea is that the King of Kings will return, and it will be

the end of history as we know it, with a new heaven and a new earth being ushered in, where all things are made new. There is no more pain or illness or hurt or death. All these things will be washed away.

We believe this because of what Jesus taught in several places in the Gospels, including Matthew 16, where he talks about what it means to be one of his followers.

## **BIBLE**

**<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. <sup>25</sup> If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. <sup>26</sup> And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul? <sup>27</sup> For the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father and will judge all people according to their deeds.**

Matthew 24 and 25 are all about the second coming of Christ. Jesus predicts the distraction of the temple in Jerusalem which will happen in 70 A.D., around 40 years after his death and resurrection. Jesus describes many horrible things that will happen before he returns and then he says these words at the end of chapter 24.

## **BIBLE**

**<sup>42</sup> “So you, too, must keep watch! For you don’t know what day your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup> Understand this: If a homeowner knew exactly when a burglar was coming, he would keep watch and not permit his house to be broken into. <sup>44</sup> You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected.**

He goes on in the next chapter tell three parables of judgment, one of them is about sheep and goats. Jesus talks about a time of judgment



when sheep, those who cared for those that were thirsty and hungry and naked and sick and a foreigner, enter paradise. The goats, those who ignored others that needed assistance and were constantly selfish, are sent to Gehenna. We get to the ending verses of the book of Revelation, at the end of our Scriptures, we find these words in chapter 22.

## **BIBLE**

**<sup>20</sup> He who is the faithful witness to all these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon!”**

**Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!**

**<sup>21</sup> May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s holy people.**

Even this earliest letter of the New Testament refers to the second coming of Christ. As you are reading 1 Thessalonians, take a close look at the last words of every chapter because they each speak about the second coming of Christ or a nod to the final judgment in some way. We find this idea in our earliest Christian document and in our earliest creed, “The Apostle’s Creed.”

**SLIDE      [Jesus] was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

Paul continues in the text we have before us today from 1 Thessalonians 14 to give perplexing details about how this works when we lose a loved one.

## **BIBLE**

**<sup>15</sup> We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have**

died. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. <sup>17</sup> Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. <sup>18</sup> So encourage each other with these words.

Paul is in essence telling us that those who have died are in paradise first and there waiting for us! How awesome is that? Our loved ones or with Jesus in the welcome party, experiencing paradise. We don't have to worry about those who have passed away because they will see Jesus before we do. There is this wonderful language about Jesus coming down from heaven to shout and with the blowing of the trumpets. The glory of God showing up in Jesus as he is caught up in the clouds and we join him for eternity. If we take this literally, we can picture people flying in the air, but it's also his powerful metaphor about what happens when the king of kings and the Lord of lords returns.

**SLIDE**      **“caught up” = *raptus*, where we get the word “rapture”**

You may have heard this idea of the rapture, or those in the church being caught up at the second coming of the Lord. There is also this idea of meeting the Lord in the air, and that word “meet” is a technical term in the Greek that was used when a king or dignitary would go out and meet someone outside the city walls and bring them back into the protection of the city. In this case, we have this idea of the saints on earth and those who have died and gone ahead of us, going ahead, and meeting the Lord as we are ushered into a new Kingdom where God reigns forever and ever. Christ will rule over everything and restore paradise, all of creation, to the glory it was intended to be.

I realize that some of this feels like bizarre language because it's not

part of our common vocabulary. Most of us view this as metaphor which describes the reality that all of what we experience will one day come to a conclusion and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. The world will not go on as it is today. Evil will not continue and there will be an ending and a new beginning.

Some of us get caught up in thinking about this so much that it overwhelms us, especially with the proliferation of books and blogs and websites trying to predict the end times and the rapture. This becomes very common in times like pandemic or global warfare. Every passage in the Bible, which is apocalyptic in nature, or symbolically paints a picture of what might happen in the end times is dissected. I've shared with you the story before of me attending a youth group when I was younger where they showed us a movie that depicted many of these images and it scared the Be-Jesus out of me! All of us were convinced to get baptized in that moment because we didn't want to be left behind!

There have always been groups who believe we are living the last days, and you might find yourself among them at times. I know there are times I have asked and wondered this question and it's only natural and part of being human and a follower of Jesus who has read the text like the one we have before us today from Thessalonians. We have songs in our tradition like, "I'll Fly Away," which we can see as metaphor or a literal description of flying away and meeting Jesus in the clouds. My grandmother used to listen to that song, "Soon and very soon we are going to meet the King," and the idea that Christ is coming back soon, and we should be ready.

Some read the Scriptures from Matthew 24 or Daniel or Ezekiel and equate them to what we see happening on the nightly news. Preachers will show up with these huge charts pointing out what was happening in the world and how related to the book of Revelation. Here are a few of those charts that maybe you have seen before traveling around on

Facebook or YouTube.

**GRAPHIC Revelation Timeline 1**

**GRAPHIC Chronology of Last Days**

**GRAPHIC Revelation Timeline Chart**

**GRAPHIC From Here to Eternity Biblical Timeline**

Here is a chronology of the last days by another religious leader. There are timelines and charts and sometimes we can be overwhelmed and convinced that Jesus must be coming back because of what's happening in the world and how it lines up with Scripture. Especially like this last one, laying out a timeline from here to eternity and updated just this year to take into account our turbulent times. I remember the conversations and that youth group about the need to get married early so you can have sex before the rapture. No pun intended! They would always end the service with, **"I'll see you next week or I'll see when the clouds!"**

The question we often get asked is if we take this language literally or metaphorically as we read it in Thessalonians. We as followers of Jesus tend to make two mistakes with this material. The first mistake is that we set aside and don't pay any attention to it in the second mistake is that we assess about it. I have friends in more liberal religious traditions who have said we should just ignore the apocalyptic literature in the Bible. We sometimes forget to talk about this grand and glorious climax that will happen as a result of the return of Christ. But we also can go to the other extreme. I have a friend who is a Pentecostal pastor who sometimes says of his own people, **"We are so heavenly minded we are often of no earthly good."**

While it is good to focus on living the gospel here and now, we also need to hear these wonderful words about putting life here and now in

perspective. Paul is trying to help us not to mourn as those who have no hope because when we do that, we get stuck in our grief. My experience during the past 18 months is that many of us have gotten stuck because we have lost much, and we grieve and sometimes we lose sight of hope. I have seen often in today's world grief from the pandemic causing anger in frustration because we lose perspective and forget that the worst thing is never the last thing. Yes, we are to grieve and there that we have lost in times like pandemic, but we don't grieve as people without any hope, and we can forget that if we simply skip over passages like the ones we find for the Thessalonians. Paul says to **encourage one another** with these words because he knows that we will forget and lose sight in perspective.

It's clear that the people of Thessalonica were asking another question because of how Paul begins the next chapter. They want to know when Jesus is returning because they want to know when they will see their loved ones, and they want to know how they will know that the end has come. In 1 Thessalonians 5 we read these words.

## **BIBLE**

**1 Now concerning how and when all this will happen, dear brothers and sisters, we don't really need to write you. <sup>2</sup> For you know quite well that the day of the Lord's return will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night.**

Notice that this is the same language used by Jesus in Luke's gospel that we read earlier. We don't know when the thief will come so the idea is that we are to be ready at all times.

**GRAPHIC            Security Cameras**

**GRAPHIC            Jesus is coming. Look busy!**

I find it rather ironic that we now have had to put security cameras like this all over our building because of strange activity in our parking lot

at night. Don't worry, you're not all in danger, but we are living out these Scriptures kind of by putting up these cameras and acting as if we are always on the watch and on the lookout. I especially like this bumper sticker I have seen over the past few years, "Jesus is coming so look busy!" While it might make us laugh a bit, the idea is that we are supposed to be ready at all times, knowing that one day Jesus will return. Paul goes on with these words.

## **BIBLE**

**<sup>3</sup> When people are saying, "Everything is peaceful and secure," then disaster will fall on them as suddenly as a pregnant woman's labor pains begin. And there will be no escape.**

**<sup>4</sup> But you aren't in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won't be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief.**

Verse 5 is our Scripture memory verse for the week so let's say together out loud.

## **BIBLE**

**<sup>5</sup> For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don't belong to darkness and night.**

This entire sermon series is called "Lighting the Way," because we are meant to be children of the light and of the day. We don't belong to darkness and night. To be children of the light and of the day means that we are paying attention to the world around us and that we are seeking daily to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world, following him and serving him as our Lord and King. We learned about this last week when I asked what would be like for each of us to wake up each day and ask this question.

**SLIDE      How can I please God today?**

Ultimately, that is practicing agape, sacrificial and servant love. We love God and we love others, and we share the good news by being the presence of Christ in the world. We are living and walking in the light, sharing the love of Christ because we have hope, and we don't belong to the darkness and night. Paul goes on to describe what this looks like.

## **BIBLE**

**<sup>6</sup> So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded. <sup>7</sup> Night is the time when people sleep, and drinkers get drunk. <sup>8</sup> But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation.**

There is that word "faith" that we find throughout this letter, reminding the Thessalonians to continue to be trustworthy and to do what pleases God. Ultimately, we are to be closed and protected in love, confident in our salvation, which is about bringing hope to ourselves and to others in the world around us. If we put on this clothing, this armor in this helmet, we don't need to be afraid of anything. If we are ready at all times, knowing that we belong to God, we will be ready at all times for whenever the return of Christ happens. We don't need to be anxious or fearful.

Sometimes, we become anxious and fearful because of the way we read these texts. Paul warns about this in his next letter to the Thessalonians. Here's what we read in 2 Thessalonians 2.

## **BIBLE**

**2 Now, dear brothers and sisters, let us clarify some things about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and how we will be gathered to meet him. <sup>2</sup> Don't be so easily shaken or alarmed by those who say that the day of the Lord has already begun. Don't believe them, even if they claim to have had a spiritual vision, a revelation, or a**

**letter supposedly from us. <sup>3</sup> Don't be fooled by what they say. For that day will not come until there is a great rebellion against God and the man of lawlessness is revealed—the one who brings destruction. <sup>4</sup> He will exalt himself and defy everything that people call god and every object of worship. He will even sit in the temple of God, claiming that he himself is God.**

Paul reminds them that there will be people who will come and try to keep them from pleasing God and try to convince them that they are God. In Matthew 24 and here in Thessalonians in the book of Revelation and in many other apocalyptic literatures they talk about how times will be difficult and challenging before the return of Christ. This sometimes is called the tribulation. I think it's important to think carefully and critically about these texts and what it is Paul and Jesus are trying to tell us even today.

What we find is that the picture painted in all this apocalyptic literature can describe what is happening at just about any given point in history. I think that is actually the point. What is interesting is that what Jesus described in Matthew 24 is exactly what happens in A.D. 70 when the Roman Empire comes in and destroys Jerusalem and the Temple. What Paul describes in first and second Thessalonians is what people were experiencing during that time in the first century. Revelation is written around the time the Roman Emperor Dometian is doing horrible things to the followers of Jesus and they are also in danger of succumbing to the culture around them and giving up their faith, compromising their values and what it means to live as a disciple of Christ. Most of what we read Revelation seems to be referring to what is happening in A.D. 95, at that very point in human history.

**SLIDE                      Be ready whenever!**

As someone who loves history, I really believe that all this literature



in the words of Paul in the words of Jesus in the words of John in Revelation are meant to be a message to us to be ready whenever, because there will be hardship and difficulty in every generation and being ready whenever helps guard our hearts and bring us hope in carry us through. Our faith literally becomes armor and a helmet and a shield against all the challenges we will experience in life, both personal and as a nation or community or world. **Whether it is a pandemic or a divorce or a job loss or financial distress or an unexpected illness, if we will be ready whenever, then whatever comes we can survive.**

We are meant to be on our guard at all times because there will always be people trying to use their persuasive powers in their arrogance pull us away from our faith and put our faith in them. We are challenged to not be led astray and not give in and not give up. Instead, Jesus calls us to follow him and pay attention because one day he will come back for us and for all who call him Lord and Savior. Can I just tell you that every generation has read the book of Revelation and believed they were living in the end times! This is not unique to us. There is always someone in each time trying to convince people that the end is happening now.

In some ways, that is the beauty of the language, so that every generation could recognize and remember that the end will come. I think there are two major points to this apocalyptic literature.

#### **SLIDE                      Words of Comfort**

First, they are meant to be words of comfort, reminding us as Paul did the Thessalonians in the first century, that even when it's scary and difficult and challenging, it will be okay. Life is really hard and things around you might seem evil, but it won't have the final word. That's what we are reminded of in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians and in Matthew's gospel and in the book of Revelation. All these passages promise us that no matter how hard life is right now, this is not the end. God will redeem

and heal and restore paradise. There will be in and to the world as we know it and there will be a new beginning with no more tears or sorrow or pain. There will be a new heaven and a new earth, and all these things will be washed away forever. You can trust and not be afraid.

**SLIDE                      Be Ready**

The second thing these are telling us I believe this to be ready. Be ready for when hardship comes so we don't compromise. Be ready for the return of Christ by asking how we might please God every day and how we might live out agape, sacrificial love, in every moment and in every interaction and in every relationship.

People have asked me over the years we are living in the last days. During the last election, people on the left look at Pres. Trump and thought he was the kind of leader talked about in Revelation or the man of lawlessness mentioned in Thessalonians, in terms of someone who is arrogant or leading people astray. Others, on the conservative and the spectrum, said he was the opposite and was the one sent by God to lead us. There have even been billboards claiming he was the equivalent of the chosen one.

I find it fascinating because a years earlier the people on the right were claiming that Pres. Obama was the leader talked about in Revelation or the man of lawlessness mentioned in Thessalonians. Those on the left claimed he was a leader sent by God in these moments to help right the wrong of 150 years of slavery. I remind people constantly that the greatness of our nation is because every four or eight years we get a new president and the old one goes back to being an ordinary citizen. We are meant to have checks and balances and we don't have a king, regardless of how puffed up any president might seem.

In every era I have seen dozens of videos and articles claiming we are living in the last days and equating some of the things mentioned in

apocalyptic literature to what is happening in our world. So, Pastor Jeff, stop dodging the question! Are we living in the end times? I could be wrong but let me give you my two-prong answer. **No, I don't believe we are living in the end times, but I do believe we are to be ready and live as if we are all the time.**

I don't believe that the biblical literature we have about the end times are equated to modern day events specifically. I do believe are scriptures point to big things that happen in every generation. I look back over the history of the last hundred years and I think if ever the Scriptures in Revelation and other apocalyptic literature were being fulfilled literally, it would've been during World War II and the Holocaust. Adolf Hitler seemed to be a clear picture of the Antichrist. If I were living during that time, I would've been certain that Jesus was returning any moment. Christ did not come back in the 1940s, but those words Revelation and Thessalonians brought comfort and encouragement to people because they realize no matter how evil things are, Christ will have the final word. Hitler will be destroyed, and God will have the final word somehow and in some way.

**SLIDE**      **"I do not know with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones."** – Albert Einstein

Every president over the last 100+ years have had some segment of the Christian population think that person was the Antichrist. I want us to be really careful about calling people the Antichrist and I hope we pay attention when arrogance and pride lead religious people, Christians from the left or the right, to take their eyes off Jesus and put their eyes on some political leader because that is the very kind of thing we see going on in the book of Thessalonians in the book of Revelation.

**SLIDE**      **"Once we start believing that the apocalypse is coming, the**

**amygdala goes on high alert, filtering out most anything that says otherwise.” — Peter Diamandis**

I want to remind us that if we are easily caught up in the idea of the end times apocalyptic literature, we also can become naturally turn to hide and succumb easily to conspiracy theories. We can find all kinds of great correlations between the literature in the Scriptures and the conspiracy theories that we want to believe and get sucked into. We have seen it with multiple movements over the last few years in particular where leading Christians have begun following a false religion. It is why Paul tells the Thessalonians to be clearheaded and keep their eyes open and focused on Jesus.

**SLIDE “I have heard the languages of apocalypse, and now I shall embrace the silence.” — Neil Gaiman**

We are to be ready for the coming of Christ and find our hope in the promise from Jesus that Christ will return. Our loved ones are with him now and they will be with him when he returns, so we can grieve as people with hope. Let me ask you this question. **Are you ready for Christ to return?** I don't know when he will return because he even said he didn't know when he would return. If anyone tells you they know, be very careful because that goes against the Scriptures and what Jesus said himself.

**SLIDE “It's the end of the world every day, for someone.” — Margaret Atwood**

What I do know is that every day around the world 200,000 people die, and in that moment, they will meet Christ to face. Most often, we don't know when that will happen. Over 30 years of pastoral ministry I have known people who went to work in the morning and never made it home. I have seen car accidents, heart attacks, unforeseen trauma, and murders take lives suddenly and where no one expected. Each of those

reminds me that every day when I wake up, I want to ask what I can do to please God and to be sure that I am ready. When I wake up every day I want to say, **“Lord, I don’t know what today holds, but I want to be ready. I trust you. I give my life to you. Save me. Deliver me. Wash me clean and make me new. Help me to honor you and be faithful. Help me to love you and love others. Help me to share the good news. Help me to be ready.”**

That’s what I want for each of us because all these images we read about the Scriptures are a puzzle that we probably will never put fully together. We do know, at moments we least expect it, people pass suddenly. We also know that each one of us will leave this life, either in our own time or when Christ returns. At some point I will die and stand before Christ. When I do, I want to be found ready. How about you?

I want us to grieve as people with hope and I want us to be ready. Let’s say together again our Scripture memory verse, reminding ourselves that we belong to the light and not the darkness.

## **BIBLE**

**<sup>5</sup> For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don’t belong to darkness and night.**

Let’s pray.

## **SLIDE                      Prayer**

As we bow our heads and close our eyes, I want to give you an invitation as we pray. You might whisper to Jesus these simple words.

*Jesus, I want to be ready... I put my trust in you as my Savior... Save me and deliver me... Forgive me... Wash me clean and make me new... I want to follow you as my Lord... Help me to live faithfully... Help me to please you... Help me to practice selfless love... Help me to live as a child of the light... And trust myself to you... Help me be ready when you come... In*

*your holy name...Amen*

**SLIDE                      Communion**

### **October 2-3 Order**

1. Ely Welcomes people and says, **“Today we are going to talk about what happens when we die and what it means that Christ will come again. We know that many try to predict the end times, but is that possible? How do we know when Christ will return, and what does that mean for our lives today?”**
2. One Song, followed by prayer
3. Welcome and invite people to wave and be seated.
4. Announcements by Jeff (Check News Section on Website)
  - Communion
  - Traditional Worship gathering October 7 at 5 p.m.
5. Invite congregation to prepare their hearts for the message.
6. Video bumper plays.
7. Sermon
8. Prayer after sermon
9. Bless Communion Elements
10.        Offering SLIDE and Focus
11.        2 Songs of Worship
12.        Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
13.        Meditation Moments reminder by Jeff
14.        Care Ministers (If any are present)
15.        Closing Prayer