

Thessalonians
Week 5: Who Is Your Hero

I. This morning, we will be studying from 1 Thessalonians 5. Before we read the Scripture, please allow me to give an executive summary of the previous chapters.

A. What We Have Learned So Far?

- 1. 1 Thessalonians 1: The Thessalonian believers became a model for other believers.**
- 2. 1 Thessalonians 2: Paul, as their spiritual parent, charged them to walk in a manner worthy of God.**
- 3. 1 Thessalonians 3: Paul sent Timothy to visit them and rejoiced with the reports.**
- 4. 1 Thessalonians 4: Paul gave instructions about a sanctified life pleasing to God and the second coming of Christ.**

B. Studying this book and learning from our brothers and sisters in Thessalonica has been an amazing journey. Though they were no longer with us in this world, the stories about their faith are still alive. Though they were young in their faith, living in the face of a powerful kingdom and domination of Rome at the time, they lived out their faith courageously and joyfully. So, it was evident to their non-believer neighbors in the society that they were different and sincere about their new faith. Their faith is real.

II. Let us continue reading our next and final lessons in Chapter 5. To help us study today's lessons is best to divide them into three parts: verses 1-10, 11-13, and 14-28. Let us read the first part.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 (NIV) - 1 Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 4 But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

A. The Day of the Lord

- 1. In about a month of spending time with them, we read in Chapter 5 and in the previous Chapter Paul had taught them about "the day of the Lord." Paul used both available time references in the Greek system, Chronos, which is for "the times," and Kairos for "the dates" to describe "the day of the Lord" to the Thessalonian believers. It could happen unexpectedly.**
- 2. In the Old Testament, the conception of the Day of the Lord is quite common; all the pictures and symbols that belong to the Day of the Lord have been attached to the Second Coming. To the Jew, all time was divided into two ages. There was this present age which was entirely bad.**
 - a. Paul also mentioned it in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16. Paul said that sinners are constantly filling up their sins to the limit, and God's judgment and punishment, His wrath, will come upon them. This age is surely incurably bad. There is no cure and hope in the world.**
- 3. And then, there was the age to come, which would be the golden age of God.**

Zephaniah 1:14-16 - In between, there was the Day of the Lord which would be a terrible day. It would be a day when one world was shattered, and another was born.

 - a. In different descriptions of the Old Testament about the Day of the Lord, they share the same characteristics as follows:**
 - (1) It would come suddenly and unexpectedly.**
 - (2) It would involve a cosmic upheaval in which the universe was shaken to its very foundations.**
 - (3) It would be a time of judgment.**
 - b. The New Testament writers identified the Day of the Lord with the day of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. They are not meant to be taken literally. They are pictorial visions of what would happen when God broke into time.**

4. About the Day of the Lord, Jesus himself had bluntly said that no man knew when that day or hour would be, that even he did not know. Only the Father knew, as mentioned in Matthew 24:36. And Jesus said the Day of the Lord might come like a thief (Matthew 24:43). No thief will announce their coming to their victim. If it does, they will be stupid and get caught. Jesus said, "The Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." Paul repeats that the coming of the day will be sudden. Like Jesus, Paul said the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

5. Peace and Safety (Pax Romana) - Paul said the Thessalonian unbelievers would say to them, "Peace and safety." This statement is like a slap on the face of the unbelievers because it is an ironic reference to the slogan of Roman's superpower domination, "Pax Romana." It literally means "Roman Peace" and is commonly defined as the period running from the foundation of the Roman imperial system for two hundred years under Augustus Caesar from 27 BCE until around 180 CE, with the death of Emperor Marcus Aurelius.

- a. But whose "peace"? The Romans? Her citizens and people who were loyal to them? How about their oppositions and enemies? How about the Christians who lived in Thessalonians and other Roman territories? Some commentaries say, "One of the ironic trends during the Pax Romana was that Christianity was widely persecuted throughout the Roman empire."
- b. To those who lived and depended on the Roman's power and prosperity, they might be proud and arrogantly believed they were on the right side of history. They might look down on their believing neighbors. Using a sports metaphor, they are playing in a team of top athletes, coaches, and management who believe they can do whatever it takes, even cheating, to win it all. We live in an era where people celebrate the results, rewards, and performances but forget the process and simple faith.
- c. The Thessalonian believers were a minority and lived under the powerful influence of the Romans and their non-believer neighbors. Everywhere they went, they would find the practices of worshiping the emperor, gods, and goddesses of their land. So, surely when the unbelieving neighbors of the Christians in Thessalonica said, "Peace and safety," they would refer to the "forced" or "mandatory" allegiance, socially, emotionally, and spiritually to Roman's power, culture, and belief systems.
- d. This text is more familiar to me and the believers who live in countries and regions where to follow Christ is writing your death sentence or getting negative and unfair treatment by others. I believe Paul wrote his thoughts about those who were yet to put their faith in Christ from his heart of love.

B. In 1 Thessalonians 5:3-8, Paul creates an even more elaborate contrast between the believers and unbelievers, each point showing the believers to occupy the more advantageous positions.

	Believers	Non-believers
Benefit	In Christ (eternal)	In Roman's emperor (temporal)
Protection	By Christ alone	By the Roman authority
Finance	Might be poor	Rich and prosperous
Condition	Persecuted	Free life
Status	The children of the light and the day	The children of the darkness and the night
About the Day of the Lord	Not surprised	Surprised
Their reaction	Prepared (serious), Awake and be ready, Be alert and self-controlled	Unprepared (not taking it seriously), Sleep (apathetic) and drunkenness
Going in the Day of the Lord	Escaped (saved)	Cannot escape
Facing death	With hope	Without hope
Result	Salvation and eternal life	Sudden destruction and separation from God

1. Paul also insists that there is no reason why a man should be caught unawares. Only the man who lives in the dark and whose deeds are evil will be caught unprepared. The Christian lives in the light; no matter when that day comes, it will find him ready if he is watchful and sober. Waking or sleeping, the Christian lives already with Christ and is therefore always prepared.

2. Paul reminded the believers about their identity in Christ, the children of the light and the day. So then, he charged them to be alert and self-controlled as Christ did (Luke 21:36). And Paul used the illustration of sleep and drunkenness to describe those who are not seriously walking with the Lord, who yield to sin, who do not care about their salvation and eternal destiny. Paul admitted that he was indifferent about the Lord previously (Ephesians 2:1-3). I confess before you that I was like them at one point. Thanks to the grace of God, because of our faith in Christ Jesus, we were born again.

C. Faith, Love, and Hope - As a child of the day, where Christ rules, Apostle Paul used an illustration of the military in this verse, "let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet" (verse 8). He used a very basic Christian faith here, a triad of traits—that is foundational and essential: namely, faith, hope, and love. The breastplate and helmet are necessary for a soldier. He could not do his duty to go to war without them. In a sense, in our spiritual walk, if we do not have these, we do not have Christ. When you feel overwhelmed by the complexity and lofty calling of God and the Christian faith, refocus on this simple triad that sums up the heart of Christian living.

1. The perception of reality of the neighbors of the Thessalonian believers crumbles in the face of death and cannot adequately answer the real issues of life. Their neighbors might persuade them to return to the old ways. Still, Paul depicts this in strokes that suggests returning to sleep, and drunkenness is a crisis at hand, to moral looseness when God's holiness beckons, to darkness when the bright light of God's Day is already dawning. Perhaps some believers went astray and returned to their old lifestyles. We know it so well. We are not perfect, either. That's why Paul called them to stay alert, be ready and prepared, and stand firm in the faith so they would be saved at the Judgment Day. As the Lord once said, "But the one who endures to the end will be saved (Matthew 24:13)."

D. Jesus is the True Hero - The more I read this passage about the Day of the Lord, the more I am convinced that it is less about us but the Lord. It's not about us at all. It's all about the Lord, Jesus Christ. He obeyed the rescue mission from the Father set for Him to accomplish before the world began, died on the cross for all of us to save us from our sins and the wrath of God (reconcile us with God), and to give us eternal life in Him by His grace alone. "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10)."

1. And the author of the book Hebrews wrote, "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Hebrews 12:2-3)."

2. Not only is He our Savior, but He is also
Our true Redeemer (Galatians 3:14)
The true living God (Philippians 2:9-11)
The King of Kings (Revelation 19:16)
The Just Judge (John 5:30 and John 8:16)
Jesus is the King of Glory (Psalm 24:8-10)

3. Jesus is the true Hero, the righteous one, who would rule on the Judgment Day. Are you with Him? Do you believe in Him? Are you on the right side of eternity? Believe in Jesus! The Roman emperors ruled at a certain time; now they were all dead and gone, but Jesus is still alive and rules this world. You are always on the right side of history if you trust and obey Jesus.

III. Part 2:

1 Thessalonians 5:11-13 (NIV) - "11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. 12 Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other."

A. Paul also remembers the Thessalonians' "labor of love." We might restate that phrase like this: "Hard work for others generated by love for them."

B. As a Good pastor, Paul did whatever he could to encourage the Thessalonian believers with his love. He needs to reassure the new believers there that they were not abandoned by their teacher, left alone to fend for

themselves against the unsupportive society. Paul left their town, but he continued to carry them with him daily in his heart and thought of them and their well-being constantly. Here is a list of a few things that he did for them:

1. He gave thanks to God for them (1:2a)
 2. He prayed for them (1:2b)
 3. He wrote pastoral letters to them (1 Thes 1:1, 2 Thes 2:1)
 4. He praised them (1:2b, 1:7, 1:9, 2:20)
 5. He sent Timothy (his spiritual son) to them (3:2)
 6. He told them he wished to visit them again (2:17).
- C. As a result of Paul's intimate relationship with them, being disciplined by Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus, Paul rejoiced to hear great feedback from Timothy about the believers in Thessalonica. They also imitated what Paul and his coworkers did for them. They too:
1. Encourage one another (5:11,14)
 2. Build one another up (5:11)
 3. Love one another more and more (4:9-10)
 4. Comfort one another (4:18).
- The word "build-up" or "edify" used in verse 11 is a metaphor for building a house. It means to establish, to promote growth of Christian wisdom, affection, grace, virtue, holiness, blessedness.
5. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we witnessed effective discipleship and church growth happening among the believers in Thessalonica. Some of the healthy practices that Paul taught among the believers there are to respect their spiritual leaders and hold them in the highest regard in love. They are men and women of God who work hard among them, are over them in the Lord, and teach them. Hebrews 13:17 also similarly mentioned, "Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you."
- D. Paul reminds the Thessalonian converts of the community believers around the Mediterranean. He draws attention to the way of all these people by their bold commitment to Jesus in the face of opposition. And how their faith, how they deal with each other, and how they treat their leaders with respect and love become an example to other believers in the Mediterranean and a witness to their neighbors who are yet to follow Christ.
- E. The behavior of Christian leaders must be different from the Roman leaders at the time. The latter controlled their subjects with fear and terror. One of the websites about ancient Rome says, "The Roman legionaries were not well-disciplined soldiers. They were, in point of fact, often aggressive, individualistic, foolish, disobedient, rash, impatient, and impulsive soldiers." What can you expect to be led by the leaders like they were?
1. The Lord blesses the leaders that please the Lord. In 2 Timothy 2: 24-25, the leaders often play an important role in helping new believers connect well with the maturing believers in the church, assisting their relationships, growing closer toward each other and the Lord, and not showing any favoritism. Feelings of attachment and experiences of encouragement within the new group of believers will outweigh the feelings of disconnectedness from society and experiences of discouragement from outsiders.
 2. Care for and being cared for by the brothers and sisters will lead to an increased desire to conform to the values of the group and to be held in esteem by those who are important to Christian's daily life. The word "love" in the original language here is agape, which means unconditional and sacrificial love from the Lord.
- F. Besides respecting our spiritual leaders and holding them in the highest regard in love (verses 12-13), we are to support them (1 Tim 5:17-18), to pray for them (Ro 15:30), and to follow them (Heb 13:17). The godly attitudes toward godly Christian leaders are a way to attract the outsiders to Christ and the fellowship of the community of believers.
- G. The Amazing Heroes Among Us - I want to do an unusual exercise today and I need everyone's help this morning. I want to take the time for this exercise. I want to talk about leaders in our church. Our church has different ministries, inside and outside the walls of this church. There are many of the ministry workers among us. We are all God's servants. We also export some of our best here, locally and globally, for the sake of Christ.

1. Some leaders have titles in the church, like pastors, elders, Sunday school teachers, church staff, etc., but some do not. Some work up front, and some work behind the scenes. I believe with all my heart that we have many amazing leaders among us. These men and women of God do the work of the Lord whether they get recognized or not. But, like the latter ones, many of our leaders do not get the recognition they deserve. Not that they seek any of it. I know their goal is to put God first, others second, and themselves third. "The world will know that we are His disciples if we love one another," Christ said. Let us start with ourselves, our church.

First, I want to encourage you and me to take a moment to write down the names of at least five people from our church who faithfully lead you, serve you, encourage you, counsel you, challenge you to do godly things, empower you, help you, cry with you, model for you the Christian walk, etc. "You got it?" Go ahead, write those names.

2. Second, I want to ask you to pray for them.
3. Third, I want to encourage you to do something extraordinary for them. Take them out to lunch. Give them a gift. Say something nice to them. Please do whatever you can to put a smile on their face. Because I know your kindness and prayer will go a long way in their service to the Lord.
4. Lastly, if you are okay with it, take a picture with them and post it on your social media if you have one (if not, you can send them a card) about how much you love and appreciate them. "You got it?"
5. Note: If some of your heroes have already passed away, you could still include them, by doing something nice on their behalf. That way, you keep their legacy alive.

IV. Part 3:

1 Thessalonians 5:14-22 (NIV) - 14 And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. 16 Be joyful always; 17 pray continually; 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not put out the Spirit's fire; 20 do not treat prophecies with contempt. 21 Test everything. Hold on to the good. 22 Avoid every kind of evil.

A. In these verses, many amazing qualities and principles of Christian living honor the Lord.

1. You Can Be Somebody's Hero for Christ - Earlier, we did an exercise for honoring those who are spiritual heroes to us. Now, we can learn to be somebody's hero for Christ.
2. In this last part, we will see how the early church in Thessalonica did that. Paul picked out those who needed special care and attention in the congregation (1 Thessalonians 5:14). The word used for idle (in other translations, "lazy" or "unruly") originally described a soldier who had left the ranks. The phrase really means "Warn the quitters." We are not born quitters. But we have many things in life we want to accomplish. We prayed for them that God would provide, guide us to do it well and help us to complete it. We did our best to finish it, but we could not. For some of us, the things we could not finish intimidate us. They could cause fear in our life if we let them. Sadly, some of us let them define us: a failure, a quitter, a loser. I believe Satan uses them to keep us questioning God and weakening our faith in Christ. Through our struggles and fear, Satan often uses them to make himself appear to be bigger than God and our faith. So, it is spiritual warfare. These people need the body of believers for help. That is exactly what Paul did in the next line.
3. Apostle Paul then commanded the believers to encourage those who were timid, faint-hearted, and have become fearful, literally those whose souls are small. In every community, there is the faint-hearted brother who instinctively fears the worst, but in every community, there should be Christians who, being brave, help others to be brave. "Cling to the weak" is a lovely piece of advice.
4. In Paul's life, God did not remove his pain, but it did not mean God ignored Paul's prayer. His answer was just different than Paul expected. Instead of instant healing, God gave him a promise, one of the most encouraging, comforting, reassuring words from the Lord. Paul wrote (in 2 Corinthians 12:9), "Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.'" And what God said to Paul, He says to you today, "You may feel afraid, weak, alone, or inadequate. In response, God says, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.'"

5. It should forge bonds of fellowship and persuasion to hold on to the man who is likely to stray away. To be patient with all is perhaps the hardest of all, for the last lesson most of us learn is to suffer fools gladly.
 6. Who is someone at the church that God calls you to minister this week? This month? We cannot depend on our leaders, elders, deacons, and others to serve us all the time. We are all God's servants. Be specific! Who are the special people that Paul mentioned here in verse 14? Ask the Lord to reveal these people at our church or your ministry or your community outside the church to you. When He does, be willing to obey the Lord.
- B. Do not take revenge, says Paul. Even if a man seeks out evil, we must conquer him by seeking his good. He charged them always to try to be kind to each other and everyone else, including their family members, friends, neighbors, and coworkers who do not believe in Christ. Acts of kindness is a weapon in God's hand to soften the hearts of the unbelievers.**
- C. Genuine Church - Paul gave us three marks of a genuine Church in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.**
1. It is a happy Church (verse 16: "Be joyful always."). There is in it that atmosphere of joy that makes its members feel that they are bathed in sunshine. True Christianity is an exhilarating and not a depressing thing.
 2. It is a praying Church (verse 17: "Pray continually."). Maybe our Church's prayers would be more effective if we remembered that "they pray best together who also pray alone."
 3. It is a thankful Church (verse 18: "give thanks in all circumstances"). There is always something for which to give thanks; even on the darkest day, there are blessings to count. We must remember that if we face the sun, the shadows will fall behind us, but if we turn our backs on the sun, all the shadows will be in front.
- As we practice these virtues in our church, ministry, and fellowship, I believe we do "God's will in Christ Jesus."
- 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28 (NIV) - 23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. 25 Brothers, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. 27 I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.**
- D. Followers of Jesus Christ have the incredible opportunity to experience an extraordinary Christian life because God's faithfulness is the pillar of their faith. In the original Greek text, the adjective for "faithful" means "reliable, trustworthy, permanent." The term describes someone whose steadfast affection and allegiance can always be counted on. Paul wants new believers to know, "You are not alone!" The God who calls you to holy living has promised to give you the strength, the grace to walk in holiness, and the love to provide your daily needs. God has not left you on your own to figure out how to be Christ's disciple. He is always with you; He who has called you is faithful. How badly are you willing to walk with Christ and experience His faithfulness in your life?**
- E. At the end of his letter, Paul commends his friends to God in body, soul, and spirit. But there is one very lovely saying here. "Brothers," said Paul, "pray for us." It is a wonderful thing that the greatest saint of them all should feel that he was strengthened by the prayers of the humblest Christians.**
- V. As a closing, our Lord is still the HERO at the cross, the grave, and when He comes again. Even in their limitations living in the face of opposition and persecution all the time, the believers in Thessalonica did their part by God's grace, "You yourselves became imitators of us and of the Lord when, in spite of severe persecution, you welcomed the message with joy from the Holy Spirit. As a result, you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. For the word of the Lord rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place that your faith in God has gone out (1 Thessalonians 5:6-8)."**
- A. By telling this story, He wants us to continue spreading the Gospel, the Good News about Christ, to everyone, especially those far from Christ. He once said, "And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony of all nations, and the end will come (Matthew 24:14)."**
- B. Let's labor faithfully together in God's Kingdom. Let's serve God and one another. Let's do it while we are still alive. So, let's turn our eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace. To God be the glory! In Jesus' name. Alleluia. Amen.**