

"The End of Days"

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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- 1 Thess 4:13 – 5:10 -

13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive [and] remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words. (CH 5) 1 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others [do], but let us watch and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and [as] a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.



4:13-15

Paul was, *and is*, desiring that we “understand.” Many times, he said he “doesn't want us to be ignorant.” We are not to be ignorant concerning spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1). We are not to be ignorant of Satan’s plans and strategies (2 Corinthians 2:11). We are not to be ignorant of the mystery that Israel will eventually be saved (Romans 11:25, 26). Clearly, this is a bigger issue than we tend to believe. Here, Paul says we are not to be ignorant concerning the Rapture.

The first thing we can gather here is that those who have died are now present with Christ. There are some religions, such as the Seventh Day Adventists, that teach that when a person dies, he or she is in a state of “soul sleep” that lasts until the second coming of Christ. Yet Christ Himself disputes that, having said to the thief on the cross, “...*today* you will be with me in paradise.” Not a “thousand years from now when I come back and get you.”

The Bible does not teach that the soul sleeps at the time of death. The rich man and Lazarus were both conscious in death (Luke 16:19–31). Jon Courson says this: “The moment someone leaves his body at death, an amazing thing happens. He moves into eternity, where there is no time. There’s no past, present, or future. It’s just all one great big “Now” because eternity transcends time. How do I know this? Albert Einstein hypothesized about heaven without even knowing it. His theory revealed that time would cease if one could ever travel at the speed of light. Therefore, because God is light, time ceases in His presence. Thus, from the perspective of those in heaven, the Rapture has happened, and we’re already with them in heaven.”

The second thing we can gather from this verse is that Paul did not want believers to stress over this issue or grieve over their loved ones who were gone. He saw such anguish as being rather for those who did not know Christ and were not reborn. He says, “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.”

4:16-17

Since the Lord left this planet, men have repeatedly claimed that Jesus has already returned. The Jehovah’s Witnesses claim Christ returned in 1874, and when that did not happen they said 1914, which *again*, obviously did not happen, and many folks have followed

suit, making such bold statements. 1 Corinthians 15:52 says “*It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed.*” Thus the writer Vance Havner replied... “I’m not looking for signs. I’m listening for a sound.” One thing is for sure, His return will not be a secret! The world will know clearly that the master has returned! Matthew 24:36 clearly states “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.”

According to the simplest and clearest understanding of this event, we see that those who have gone on before us will be with Christ when he returns; see vs 14.

Separate from the issue of the second coming, is an event which the church refers to as the ‘rapture’...the “caught up” of the people of God. This is not speaking of what we understand to be the “second coming” in the physical and literal sense. The words “caught up” come from the Greek language use. It is a mystical term that infers a violent and sudden departure. The Greek word for “**caught up**” is “*harpazo*,” meaning a “pulling” or “snatching” away. This word is found 14 times in the New Testament and is the same word that Philip used in Acts 8:39 concerning the baptism event in the wilderness wherein after Philip was “*harpazo’d*” and “*the eunuch saw him no more.*”

Critics will tell us that the word “rapture” never appears in scripture. And that is true of the English versions, but not the Latin. “Rapture” is the Latin version of this Greek word “caught up/snatching away.” “*in the clouds*” (vs 17) means we will meet him in the sky on this return.

Zechariah 14:4-5 tells us in his second coming, He will descend from the sky and stand upon the earth, and Matthew 24: 27-31 tells us he will be coming the second time to establish His kingdom. Now please remember that the purpose of all of this information is not meant by myself...nor do I think even scripture itself, to be a lesson in end times events as much as it is an overt reminder that we are all leaving here one day, either in a box or in a ‘blink of an eye.’ No where in scripture is this issue of the end times, the rapture and second coming, all dealt with in such emphatic clarity that we can therefore take a dogmatic position and stand on it like, say, John 3:16! Personally speaking, this fact is why I tend to avoid the issue when it comes to teaching, because people want to be dogmatic and to treat the whole matter like a Disney fantasy movie rather than a “warning shot across the bow,” which is how scripture handles it. If God wanted us to have express clarity on all the end days details, He would have given them to us, but He clearly did not. Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians... particularly these last three chapters, was wholly practical in nature. Paul was reminding them...and us, “how to walk to please God.” And that included the living in the light of His return! A reminder that we all will be with Him soon and will answer for how we have handled the investment He gave to us while here.

4:18

ARE these words a ‘comfort’ for you? Or do they cause anxiety and concern? Such sheds a great bright light on your heart and where it lay. Mt 6:21 tells us “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” It is a troubling thing to see just how angst up we can become concerning vocation, finances, where we live and our dating status, and yet how we can best serve King and kingdom rarely make it on the to the field of play...seldom do we consider what HE wants to be more important than what WE want. We most often go to God seeking *permission* rather than *direction*.

So just where is your heart today? Here...in the world and all of its temporal pleasures? Or is it with Jesus and “walking in His pleasure?”

Chapter 5

5:1-2

As Paul continues with this idea of walking in such a way as to please God...especially in these last days, he continues with the subject of the second coming of Christ. One again, this information clearly was not meant to be an instructional pamphlet on step by step end times protocol, but rather a call to live pleasing to God in light of these coming events! Does the return of Christ motivate us to action?

For many of us, it appears that we are trying to familiarize ourselves with the end days signs so we can “jump on the train” right before it leaves the station. But Paul paints that action as a highly unlikely scenario, saying that this event will come rather like a “thief in the night.”

Paul, throughout all of his writings was never a sensationalist. He never seemed to be one to try to “scare” anyone into heaven. Yet he was obligated...*as am I*, to remind all those who count themselves to be part of the family of God, that there will be an end, and after which “a judgment.” (See Heb 9:27 “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”)

2 Peter 3:10 tells us that “...the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.” Both Paul and the apostle Peter point out that when Christ does take us out of here, he will come like a “thief in the night.” Meaning no one will overtly expect Him, so no one will ‘get on that train’ at the last minute knowing that it is pulling out of the station!

While it is seemingly human nature to get caught up in all of this stuff, we see that Jesus Himself had other priorities for His followers. In Acts 1:7-8 Jesus says “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. **But you** will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere — in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Jesus was clearly more concerned with the arrival of, and their receiving of, the Holy Spirit which would equip them to “be witnesses” of Him and furthering his message and salvation in the ranks of mankind. This then should absolutely be our concern and priority also.

5:3-4

Despite not knowing the exact departure date, we, as believers, should not be surprised. **My** only surprise is that it didn’t happen today, and I was surprised yesterday that it didn’t happen yesterday. We should live in “great expectations” every day of our lives, and live out the Spirit-filled dynamic everyday as if it is our last day!

But the fact is, as we do approach the end, we are going to face greater and greater obstacles to faithful living, and more and more church-going individuals are simply not going to make the cut. They will bow out of the race before we get to the finish line. If you do not see that already happening then your eyes are not open. In fact, truth be told...and scripture re-enforces this premise, the persecution and the lies will be coming more and more from within the wider church, (if it can honestly be called “church”) and those who count themselves to be Christians will adopt more and more of the ways and positions of the world while attempting to retain the title of Christian, and will persecute you for not following suit.

NOTE: 2 Timothy 3:1-9 speaks of the attributes that those in the last days will manifest. Traits that are clearly characteristics of the culture we are currently living in without any stretch.

- James 5:3 speaks of how many of us will “heap up treasures unto ourselves” in the last days.
- Jude 1:18 “...how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts.”
- 1 Timothy 4:1-2 “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron....”

What we are seeing today is an increasing in the living out of 2 Timothy 3:5, where there is warning concerning those that would have a “form of godliness but denying its power.” Paul goes on there to tell us that we need to “turn away” from such people. The NLT version renders that verse as “They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly.” Welcome to 2023.

Practically speaking, what we see today is the overwhelming onslaught ...and the accepting of, “consumer Christianity.” We are often in the church today for what it can bring to us personally. Gone or departing are the concepts of commitment, body-life, sacrifice, community, loving, serving, and discipleship.

Even now many of us are ‘turning inward.’ Becoming distracted by ‘shiny objects’ we find in the world. By temporal and physical pleasures and pursuits. We are more interested in getting a husband or a wife than we are with serving God and kingdom. We are distracted by vocation and possessions, politics and position. We are enamored with our feelings and emotions rather than what God has instructed and stated in His Word. Many of us who even **used** to have time to serve God have set such aside to pursue the things of the world more than to please God. We fail to find joy and meaning in His presence any longer, and have “turned (our) ears away from the truth, and (have) turned aside to fables. (2Ti 4:4) And in the greatest coup in the history of Satan, we still believe that all is well and we are children of God! Yet in truth, we serve only as a beacon of warning that our Lord’s return is imminent.

The world will be saying “peace and safety”...all is well, and suddenly “destruction will be upon them.” But it doesn’t have to be that way! 2 Peter 1:3 reminds us that God has provided us with the divine power and direction so that we would have “all things that pertain to life and godliness” and such is not found out there but rather “through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.” However, I just don’t know how much we corporately really believe that anymore. How many of us are saying we are ‘of the light’ but truly living daily in the darkness? Will we be overtaken by a thief?

5:5

Paul tries to remind the readers...both then and now, that we are not...that we should not be, “of the darkness.” We are warned elsewhere that we cannot serve God and the world. (Luke 16:13) ...that we cannot “serve two masters; for either (we) will hate the

one and love the other, or else (we) will be loyal to the one and despise the other.” We, like the church in Thessalonica, know this fact, and yet many of us choose to ignore it or block out its truth.

Let me ask you that very critical question: Are you truly walking in the light? That does not mean you have arrived or that your journey is completed. However, it speaks of a present dwelling...a daily “walk.” A state of living which exists in the active presence of a Holy God.

Or are you rather living a perceived ‘secret life’ that dwells in the darkness? I say “perceived” because rarely if ever is such a life as much a secret as we personally think it is! Those around you see it, and certainly the master sees it! Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:8 “... you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.”

5:6-8

“Therefore”...or “in light of all of this,” ...let’s not be so distracted or aloof. Even though some do and many will, let us who truly love Him first, be attentive and alert to these things! For time is marching on, and we are all nearer now to that personal meeting with Christ than when we began this journey.

The key to this, as Paul points out, is the focus upon “walking in the light.” What does that mean? Our God is light, so it means to operate and live our lives in the conscious presence of God. Finding again that pleasure...the joy, in pleasing God in our daily living.

We will sometimes fall short, no doubt! And God’s grace will cover us in that, because we are, with all our might, attempting to live out the power of our salvation in the light of his presence and the light of public sight and in the accountability of Christian community. We don’t live secrets! Such a “god-pleasing” lifestyle is not merely “not sinning,” but *offensive active living*...actually **doing** the things that encompass the faith-filled life.

As we approach the end of this year, I wonder what you see when you look back over your shoulder? I wonder how many would honestly acknowledge that the past year has not been an advance but rather a retreat. Some have set down their sword and have begun to ‘vacation.’ And now you stand where King David stood, shortly before he fell into sin and murder. If he had been where he belonged, the opportunity for temptation to find root would not have been there. The same goes for us today! The idea of sober in this context includes spiritual stability, stability we need in Christ, in the Spirit, to withstand the onslaught of the darkness. As the return of Christ draws nigh, and the temptations of the darkness intensify, it is absolutely crucial for believers to have a cool, collected, mind of Christ attitude toward temptation.

5:9-10

This is a strong textual evidence of a pre-tribulation rapture of the church. God clearly states that the end days tribulation is in fact His wrath being poured out on sinful man. So because of this verse and others like it, I don’t expect to be here! God has a firm history of pulling his children out of harm’s way before He unleashes judgment upon those who stand against Him. Since He is “the same yesterday, today, and forever,” (Heb 13:8) I find no reason to believe He will suddenly change His methodology!

Know this: God is not desirous to hurt mankind. He “so loved us that He gave His only Son to die ...to be punished...in our place...for our sin.” He *loves* us! And because He does, He has given...*and will give*, every opportunity and instruction to warn us away from the darkness as well as the “wrath to come.” His *desire*...as well as His *promise*, is that alive here... or dead and thus alive with Him... that we would “live with Him.”

He wants to **live with you**. This is “walking in His pleasure.” And that does not begin “someday. It begins today. “So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Do these things, and you will never fall away.” 2 Peter 1:10