*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 24 - 29

Letters of Paul

**Monday, January 24 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3**

“Concerning when all this will happen”

 In chapter 4 Paul dealt with the fate of the Christian dead at the return of Jesus. In this chapter he will deal with the attitude of the living toward the same event. The starting point of Paul’s teaching is the issue of when the Lord will return, probably in response to a question raised by the Thessalonians. Paul writes that there is nothing more he can say on the topic, since the Thessalonians already know very well the only thing one needs to know about when it will occur: It will come like a thief in the night. The expression, taken from the teaching of Jesus, emphasizes the unexpectedness of the day’s arrival and its threatening character as a time of judgment for those who are unprepared.

 Both of these aspects are developed in verse 3. At a time when all *appears* well, destruction will arrive with the suddenness of labor pains. Anyone who is not in Christ will certainly *not* escape (any more than a pregnant woman can avoid the inevitable labor pains). Only trust in God will deliver one from the disaster accompanying the return of Christ.

*I accept as truth, Lord, that no one knows when Christ will return. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 25 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8**

“Stay alert and be clearheaded”

 The imagery of light and darkness is used throughout the Bible to designate “insiders” and “outsiders.” “Night” and “darkness” are associated with alienation from God and ignorance about the reality and consequence of Christ’s return; correspondingly, “day” and “light” are associated with salvation and knowledge about Christ’s return. In verse 7 Paul picks up yet another aspect of “night”; its association with confused thinking and behavior (drunkenness).

 Verse 6, like much of this passage, has parallels in the Gospels (“Be on your guard! Be alert!” “Do not let him find you sleeping”). Paul spells out two implications of the Thessalonians’ status as children of light. Unlike those who live in ignorance (and will thus be caught off guard), the Thessalonians are to be vigilant and expectant of Christ’s return while remaining disciplined and clearheaded concerning when it will take place. They are not to fall into the temptation of speculating about – or even claiming to know – the day. As Christ said: “No one knows about that day or hour, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32).

*I praise you, Lord, for revealing that Christ will return. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 26 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11**

“Encourage each other”

 Paul tells the Thessalonians *why* they can confidently take a position of vigilance and clearheadedness about Christ’s return: God has chosen them for eternal life. God himself has destined them not to suffer his anger for sin on the day of his judgment (which coincides with the day of Christ’s return), but rather to receive salvation. This salvation comes through Jesus Christ. Though Paul does not develop the idea here, the implication is inescapable that through the death of Jesus something happened which transformed the destiny of believers. Had Jesus not died, they too would be subject to the consequence of their sin just like those will who do not believe.

 Their concerns about what happens on the day of Christ’s return and when it will take place do not override the need to love those of our brothers and sisters in Christ who are caught up in these questions. To the contrary, it provides concrete occasions for its exercise as we comfort and encourage one another.

*You are my only source of security, Lord, in this life and the next. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 24 - 29

Letters of Paul

**Thursday, January 27 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15**

“Honor your leaders in the Lord’s work”

 In the civic or social clubs and associations that were common in first-century Greco-Roman culture, members with wealth and/or status were often given leadership positions. Within the Christian congregation, however, the key qualification for leadership was not wealth or status but giftedness for ministry. Paul wanted the congregation both to acknowledge and to respect as its leaders those people who were doing the work of ministry, and to support their leadership by living peacefully with each other.

 Paul goes on to sketch some of the responsibilities of a congregation as a whole to individuals within it who happen to find themselves in need of some kind of encouragement, help, or even warning. He calls on the entire congregation, not just the leaders, to take responsibility for mutual care. At no stage may the ordinary member lean back and say, “This is the task of the leaders alone.” In short, Paul is trying to develop in the entire congregation a sense of pastoral responsibility.

*Bless the work of our leaders, Lord, and of our congregation as a whole. Amen.*

**Friday, January 28 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22**

“Honor God’s will as you do the Lord’s work”

 The actions of rejoicing, giving thanks, and praying are all expressions of faith, as Charles Wesley’s famous hymn demonstrates:

Rejoice, the Lord is King! Your Lord and King adore! Rejoice, give thanks, and sing, and triumph evermore.

Refrain: Lift up your heart, lift up your voice! Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

Rejoicing, praying and giving thanks are based on and give concrete expression to our conviction that our Lord is indeed King; and that he will come to take us to be with him for eternity.

 Verses 19-22 contain a double responsibility: not to stifle anything that is genuinely of the Spirit, and not to attribute anything false to the Spirit. In other words, the Spirit needs to have freedom to move prophets to speak, yet what is said also needs to be tested. The primary means of testing prophecies is Scripture. Nothing that is truly of the Holy Spirit will contradict anything that God has said in his Word.

*I rejoice in you, Lord, because in Christ Jesus I belong to you. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 29 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28**

“God will make this happen”

 These final verses of the letter focus on the centrality of God for the life of the church. Paul closes the letter as it began: with the spotlight and emphasis squarely on God and Jesus Christ. In the course of the letter Paul has talked a fair amount about both himself and the Thessalonians, but at the end the last word is not about themselves but about God. The final thing he wants on our minds is God, the one who has called and saved us through Jesus Christ, who gives us the Holy Spirit in power and holiness, and who will bring us into his kingdom and glory when Jesus returns.

 In verse 24, Paul makes two affirmations about God: “God will make this happen,” and “he who calls you is faithful.” That is, not only is God able to do all that he has promised, but because he is trustworthy and reliable, he will in fact do it. Our future, in other words, rests entirely in the power and faithfulness of God as revealed through Jesus the Messiah. This we affirm by faith as we anticipate the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*I am at peace, Lord, for I trust that you will do what you have promised. Amen.*