

Rapture Not Wrath
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Pastor John Miller

Now, there are two distinct problems that have always fascinated and perplexed human minds, and I want to introduce them. First, it relates to what happens after we die. Last week I talked about that I quite often get questions on where do we go when we die. The believers in Thessalonica were worried about their loved ones who were believers, but they were dying before Jesus' return. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, we saw that Paul was assuring them that those who have died in Christ would come with Christ and that they would be resurrected—their bodies, and reunited with their soul and spirit—and that we who are alive and remain, Paul says, “. . . shall be caught up together . . . to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

The second thing that has perplexed and questioned people is the question: is there going to be an end of the world as we know it, and will there be a day of judgment or reckoning. The answer is yes. The loved ones who died are with the Lord. They're coming back, and we'll meet them in the air at the rapture. But there is a coming judgment and an end of time. We're going to see in our passage today a very important key phrase called, “the day of the Lord.” I want you to understand that term and what it's referring to, “the day of the Lord.” So, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, last week we saw the problem of bereavement, and tonight in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 it deals with the problem of judgment. So, one section, two topics: bereavement, and the other, judgment.

The world as we know it will come to an end in what the Bible calls, “the day of the Lord.” There are a series of questions that I'm going to ask in outlining this passage, verses 1-11, and we're going to take each section one at a time. The first is verses 1-3, if you're outlining with notes, What is the day of the Lord? Let's read it. Verse 1, “But of the times and the seasons, brethren,”—he's writing clearly to believers—“ye have no need that I write unto you.” Why? “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord”—there's the first reference to that phrase, “the day of the Lord”—“so cometh as a thief in the night. 3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.”

As I said, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, all the way down to 1 Thessalonians 5:11, is one section with two subjects. Now, go back with me to verse 1, “But of the times and the seasons, brethren” That word “but” there is what's called a disjunctive conjunction. It's a hinge on which a door swings, which actually connects to the subject before and leads us to the next subject but swings open and takes a different direction. A better perhaps translation there would be the phrase, “Now, concerning.” Paul used that phrase over and over in 1 Corinthians, and every time Paul would use that phrase, “Now, concerning,” he was introducing a new topic. In this passage, it's a new aspect of the same topic, the coming again of the Lord.

Remember in 1 Thessalonians 4:18 Paul said, “Wherefore comfort one another with these

words.” In 1 Thessalonians 5:11, “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.” So, it closes with comfort in 1 Thessalonians 4:18 and then closes again with comfort in 1 Thessalonians 5:11.

Verse 1, “But of the times and the seasons,” what is “the times and the seasons”? The “times” are the chronology, the order of events, and the “seasons” is the characteristics of those times. So, the “times” refers to the chronology, and the “seasons” refers to the characteristics. Again, he’s writing to brethren, and he makes this amazing statement in verse 1. He says, “. . . ye have no need that I write unto you.”

I have to be careful that I don’t get ahead of myself. Why would Paul make a statement like that? First, because they had been taught the information, they already had it. Paul had only spent three weeks in Thessalonica, but in three weeks he taught them about the rapture, about the Second Coming of Christ, and about the tribulation. These are our important doctrine. Now, he’s saying, “You don’t need me to write unto you,” and tells us why, verse 2, “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.” So, “You don’t need me to explain the chronology, you don’t need me to explain the characteristics, for you know that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” Paul starts off by reminding them that when the Lord comes...now, “the day of the Lord” is going to lead up to the Second Coming because it’s seven years up to the Second Coming. So, just to get to the point, “the day of the Lord” is the tribulation period. It is synonymous with the tribulation, which is seven years in length because it is the seventieth week of Daniel’s prophecy.

Daniel was given a prophecy about when the Lord would come back in Daniel 9, so it’s a seven-year period. It’s divided into two halves. The first 3-1/2 years in the middle of the tribulation will be what’s called, Jesus said, “. . . the abomination of desolation,”—which was—“spoken of by Daniel the prophet,” and the last 3-1/2 years is sometimes called the Great Tribulation. But, here it’s important to note, all seven years is the tribulation, even though the first 3-1/2 years will be relatively a time of peace and prosperity; the last 3-1/2 years will be a time of great judgment and God’s wrath poured out upon a Christ-rejecting world.

Now, here’s an interesting thing. I’ve got so much stuff going through my brain, I pray I can slow down a little bit and not get too convoluted. The rapture, if you remember, is a New Testament doctrine only. It’s called a “mystery.” A “mystery” by definition means something that was not known in the Old Testament but now is revealed. It also conveys the idea that it cannot be known unless God reveals it, and He did reveal it. In 1 Corinthians 15:51 on the rapture, he says, “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep,”—or die—“but we shall all be changed, 52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” so the rapture is only New Testament. There’s implications there, I want you to remember that, only New Testament.

“The day of the Lord” is both Old and New. “The day of the Lord” is all through the Old Testament and is all through the gospels, and all the way to the book of Revelation. So, it is both an Old and a New Testament revelation. The rapture concerns only the Church. I’m not just telling you this stuff, it’s super important for you to be able to fit the pieces together. The

rapture deals only with the Church—not the world, not unbelievers, not unsaved, only the Church—caught up to meet the Lord in the air. They're going to be left wondering what happened. But "the day of the Lord" involves the unbelieving world, the whole world will reel to and fro like a drunken man. It will be a time when there'll be " . . . great earthquakes . . . in divers places, and famines, and pestilences," so all the signs that we read about in what's called the Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24 and 25, happen during this seven-year period leading up to the coming again of Jesus Christ in the Second Coming. But the two contrasted is the rapture, only a New Testament doctrine involving only the Church; "the day of the Lord" is an Old and New Testament teaching, and it deals with the whole world, the judgment coming upon the whole world.

What is "the day of the Lord"? Well, it's not a 24-hour period. When it says, "the day of the Lord," it means an epoch or a period of time which runs from the tribulation period to the Second Coming. Some scholars believe it would include the Millennium, which would be the thousand-year reign of Christ, and then it ushers in the new heavens and the new earth.

I told you to get a pencil and paper ready, write down Matthew 24 and 25. I've done several series on these verses in these two chapters. This is what's known as the Olivet Discourse—it's Jesus' teaching about the Second Coming and tribulation. If you're going to understand these doctrines, you must read what Jesus said about His coming again. He was asked a question by the disciples, " . . . what shall be the sign of thy coming,"—they didn't know anything about the rapture—"and of the end of the"—age, the ai Sn? He answers the question, Matthew 24 and 25. Write down Revelation 6-20. Revelation 6-20 is "the day of the Lord," the tribulation period. It's so very important for you to understand.

"The day of the Lord," unlike the rapture, as I said, is a common theme through the Old Testament. There are four facts from our text about "the day of the Lord," and I want you to write them down. First, it comes like " . . . a thief in the night." Look at verse 1, he says, " . . . ye have no need that I write unto you." Why? "For," and by the way, I'll draw your attention to this more in a minute, but notice how this text opens each verse, "But," verse 1; "For," verse 2; "For," verse 3; "But," verse 4; and then again in verse 6, "Therefore;" verse 7, "For they;" verse 8, "But let us;" verse 9, "For God;" verse 10, "Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him." And then the, "wherefore," verse 11. This whole section is laid out logically—he makes a statement, he gives us the reason, and then makes the application—so, it breaks down quite easily.

But in the four facts about "the day of the Lord," first, it comes like a thief in the night, verse 2, "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." Years ago, back in the late '60s early '70s, I didn't get saved or walk with the Lord until 1971, but how many of you remember the movie, A Thief in the Night? Remember the movie, A Thief in the Night? It scared you to death, right? It's a movie about the rapture, but it called the rapture, "thief in the night," which actually isn't quite consistent with Scripture. The "thief in the night" imagery here, and there's a lot of metaphors going to be used in this passage, is speaking about "the day of the Lord." It includes His Second Coming. It's going to come upon the world

unawares. All through Matthew 24 and 25 Jesus emphasizes the idea that it'll catch the world off guard and unawares.

In the rapture we'll be looking for the Lord, we'll be caught up to meet Him; but the world is going to be caught off guard, and they will be caught unawares. Again, the imagery of Noah and the Flood comes to mind. In Matthew 24:37-39, Jesus says, "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be"—in the end of time in the coming of the Lord. " . . . they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" Now, there's nothing wrong with that, nothing wrong with drinking and eating and getting married. But they were living as though they were continuing on without God's judgment, and they were caught unawares, and they didn't know until the flood came and took them all away. Many times people say, "Well, the end times are going to be like the days of Noah," they go back to the book of Genesis and describe the conditions in the time of Noah. That's not what Jesus meant by that. What Jesus meant by that was that they were living as though there would be no judgment. That's why Peter in 2 Peter used the same imagery of the Flood of Noah. So, it's saying that it's going to catch them off guard like a thief. Look at verse 2 again. He says, " . . . that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night."

Now, how do thieves come in the night? Secretly, right? They don't call or announce. They don't call you on the phone and say, "Hey, can you leave the back door open? This Friday night about 3 a.m. we're going to be there to rob you. As a matter of fact, you can stack all your wealth on the kitchen counter so we can make it in and out real quick." "Okay, yeah, great, thief. I'll do that." They don't announce they are coming, they catch you unaware. That's the point. That is the point, the unbelieving world, the unsaved world, the non-Christians, they will be caught in this "day of the Lord." It will come like a thief in the night. It catches the world by surprise. Again, look at Matthew 24:37-39, and 2 Peter 3:3-5. It's so important. And, 2 Peter 3:10, they will be caught unawares.

In Matthew 25 you have the famous parable of the ten virgins—5 were wise, 5 were foolish. The wise virgins had oil in their lamps, they were looking and ready for the Lord to return. The foolish virgins weren't ready for the Lord's coming. That's what it's trying to convey.

The second fact about "the day of the Lord," is in verse 3, it begins with a false peace and security. This is why the talk about peace needed in the Middle East. We hear people talk about a two-state solution between the Palestinians, so-called, and the Israelis, and the need for peace. By the way, even today the new announcement the European Union is looking at declaring Palestine as a state and holding back support for Israel. What you're going to see, and what we're seeing so clearly right now, is people turning against the nation of Israel. Antisemitism is on the rise, it will continue to arise, it will culminate in the tribulation period. It will be a time when Jews are persecuted very severely. So, we're seeing the stage set, not for the rapture—that can happen at any moment, no signs necessary, it's imminent—but for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and I believe the rapture happens at least seven years before that time of Jacob's trouble or Great Tribulation.

So, after the rapture comes, the Antichrist will be revealed, Revelation 6 and Daniel 9:27. He makes a covenant with Israel for seven years, so Israel has to be back in the land, it has to be back as a nation and a people, and they make a covenant with Israel for seven years, that's that last seven-year period on earth.

Verse 3, "For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden"—notice—"Peace and safety; then sudden destruction." The covenant the Antichrist makes with Israel will be no doubt a peace treaty, and they'll be rejoicing and dancing in the streets, almost hailing this man as their messiah because finally Israel has peace, finally they can live in peace, but it will be short-lived, very short-lived. " . . . sudden destruction cometh upon them." Then, he gives another imagery here. The first one was " . . . a thief in the night," now it's " . . . as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." So, it begins with a false peace and sense of security. Thirdly, it brings sudden, unexpected destruction, as I just read in verse 3, " . . . then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape."

Let me keep it as simple as I can. If I try to bring too much together you'll just kind of get your head spinning and kind of confused about everything. I believe after the rapture takes place that the restraining force or power of the Antichrist, which is the Church—the Church is the salt of the earth, the light of the world—is taken up. You know, you think the world's bad right now? Do you think it's bad right now? It's dark, right? Can you imagine when every born-again Christian, every believer in Jesus Christ, disappears on planet earth? When the Church, the true Church, those who are born again, disappears and is caught up to heaven, no more Christians, people are going to freak out like never before. They're going to be doing wickedness openly, even in the daytime, not just at night. So, the light of the world—listen to me carefully—is taken out; darkness, darkness, darkness comes in its place. The "salt of the earth" is taken out at the rapture; corruption, corruption, corruption takes place all the more.

" . . . then sudden destruction cometh upon them," this is tied together with Daniel 9:27, the abomination of desolation. There'll be a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, and it will be desecrated by the Antichrist, who will erect an image of himself, command everyone to worship the image, and that you had to get a mark on your right hand or forehead—666—to buy or sell. Jesus mentioned it in Matthew 24:15. It's recorded in Revelation 13, and again, it's spoken of by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:4. Now, the last 3-1/2 years are referred to as the Great Tribulation.

Another important point about "the day of the Lord," the source of this time is God Himself pouring out His wrath. This again is very, very important to remember. We, as Christians, do suffer. Some try to say, "Well, that's not right to tell persons they'll be caught up and not have to go through the tribulation. What makes you think that the Church for two thousand years have been persecuted and suffering and we're going to get to escape?" What they fail to understand is we do suffer right now in the world. "In the world," Jesus said, "ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." But its source comes from the world, the flesh, and the devil. That's key. Our suffering, our persecution, comes from the world, comes from our flesh, and comes from the devil.

In “the day of the Lord” period, the seven years of Great Tribulation, its source comes from God Himself. If you have the Church going through the tribulation, you have God pouring out His judgment on His own body, His own Bride, the Church, the Bride of Christ. That’s inconsistent with Scripture. He’s not going to punish us in that way, or He’s not going to pour out His wrath. We’re going to see in verse 9 of our text, “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation,” so these are all very important principles that you need to have to piece together a pretribulational rapture. So, its source is God, its nature is destruction. Write down Joel 1:15 were the Prophet Joel says, “Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.” So, it comes from God.

Notice verse 3 of our text, “. . . sudden destruction.” Now, destruction is not annihilation, it’s utter and hopeless ruin. It’s not annihilation, it’s utter and hopeless ruin, so we’re just wiped out. This is not the believer, these are the unbelievers, “they” in the text. Then, write down Revelation 6-19, I’ve already given you, where all this takes place in the book of Revelation. Write down Revelation 14:10. It says, “The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God.” Revelation 6, they say, “. . . hide us from . . . him that sitteth on the throne . . . the wrath of the Lamb.” Don’t forget that the source of the tribulation is not the world, the flesh, or the devil, it is actually God Himself; and where God uses the devil, God will use the devil, but behind it to persecute the Christ-rejecting world.

Notice also the fourth fact about “the day of the Lord,” there will be no escape. Look at verse 3 again, “. . . as travail upon a woman with child; and they”—highlight the word ‘they’—“shall not escape.” This is the unbelieving world. Now, I have never had a baby. I’ve seen my children born. I was there with my wife in labor, and I saw the birth of all four of my children. Do you know sometimes when a woman is in labor and she’s starting to get ready to give birth to a child, sometimes from the pain and the trauma, she wants to change her mind. Have you ever seen that happen? She’s just starting into labor and she says, “Take me home. I changed my mind.” No, sweetheart, you’re staying right here until that baby is born. There is no going back. You kind of reach the point of no return, right? The baby must be born. That’s the imagery he’s using. So, we have, “. . . thief in the night,” now we have, “. . . as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.” When you start into those labor pains, you’ve gotta hang in there, you gotta work hard until the birth of that child. So, “. . . and they shall not escape.”

“The day of the Lord,” as far as its nature and character, write down these words. It’s described as the day of wrath, a day of judgment, a day of indignation, a day of trial, a day of trouble, a time of destruction, and darkness and desolation and punishment—“the day of the Lord.” And, there shall be no escape.

What is the purpose of the tribulation? This is by no means exhaustive, but let me mention two things. First, to prepare Israel for Messiah’s coming. It is a period primarily for the preparation of the nation of Israel for the coming of Messiah. A lot of buzz and talk today because of Israel’s war in Gaza about the Israelis people and the Jewish people, a lot of antisemitism. God has a plan for Israel. Read Romans 9, 10, and 11. In Romans 11, “And so all Israel shall be saved,” so God has made a covenant with them, it’s called the Abrahamic covenant, called the

Davidic covenant, and God has promised that they will continue as a nation.

The tribulation period is Jewish by nature. Here's a verse to write down, Jeremiah 30:7. It says, "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it." It's called, "the time of Jacob's trouble," so its purpose is for Israel. That's why it goes all the way back to Daniel 9 when there will be seventy weeks, or seventy, seven-year periods, of God's wrath poured out upon a Christ-rejecting world to bring the nation of Israel to repentance in preparation for the coming of Messiah.

The second purpose of the tribulation is to punish sinners. Isaiah 26:21, "For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity." You know, in the Old Testament, Egypt under Pharaoh tried to exterminate all the male babies of the Jews. Haman's plot, in the book of Esther, to destroy all the Jews failed. King Herod, when Jesus was born, tried to destroy all the male babies born in Bethlehem, and it failed. Hitler, during WWII, tried to exterminate the Jewish people, and it failed. The Antichrist, when he comes, will try to eliminate the Jewish people, and it will fail because God has a plan and a purpose for His people.

Now, I want to move to the second question in verses 4 and 5, that is, will the church go through the seven-year tribulation? So, he describes "the day of the Lord," verses 1-3, as coming " . . . as a thief in the night." It will start off as a time of peace and prosperity, everything's great, " . . . then sudden destruction cometh upon them." I want you to notice in verse 3, the word "they" and "them" and then again at the end of verse 3, " . . . and they shall not escape." This is a reference to non-Christians, the unbelieving world. This is not the brethren; this is not the believers. It's so very important.

But then it stops in verse 4, it changes, "But ye, brethren." So, it goes from "they," "them," "they;" verse 4, "But ye, brethren." Now he's speaking to the believers. "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day"—what day? "the day of the Lord"—" . . . should overtake you as a thief. 5 Ye,"—again, now he's speaking about the believers—"are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness." So, will the Church go through the seven-year tribulation period? I believe the answer is no. I believe clearly the Bible teaches otherwise. I believe this whole passage is Paul teaching us that they will not be here for "the day of the Lord" or the tribulation period. Why? Reason one in the text, verses 4-5, "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of the darkness." "The day of the Lord," is a time of darkness, thick darkness. We're " . . . children of light, and the children of the day."

Now, the contrast, as I pointed out, in verse 3, "they," "them," the unsaved or unbelievers; and then verses 4-5 have "ye," "you," "we," this is the saved believers. The tribulation is a time of darkness. Write down Amos 5:18, " . . . the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light." Verse 20, " . . . even very dark, and no brightness in it." It's a dark period. Basically, to keep it simple, Paul's contrasting the tribulation period as darkness. We're children of the day, we're children of the light. We're not even of the darkness. We have no connection to darkness. It's not even a

part of God's plan or purpose for us.

A couple of quick notes on pretribulationism. The Church is never mentioned on earth during the tribulation from Revelation 6-19. The Church is never mentioned on earth during the tribulation, Revelation 6-19. Actually, the Church in Revelation 2 and 3 is on earth; in Revelation 4 and 5, it's in heaven; and in Revelation 6, the tribulation period starts; in Revelation 19, the Church comes back with Jesus Christ. So, just the layout and chronology of the book of Revelation actually speaks of a pretribulational rapture.

Secondly, the church of Philadelphia is promised to be kept from the hour of tribulation, specifically Revelation 3:10. The church of Philadelphia is given a very specific promise to be kept from this hour of trouble.

Thirdly, the doctrine of imminency that the Lord could come at any moment would be eliminated. If we believed that the rapture is in the tribulation period, we would believe that we would see the Antichrist, we would see the covenant made with Israel, we would perhaps see the abomination of desolation, so we would know that the rapture was coming very close.

Another little footnote, too, in Matthew 25, in the Olivet Discourse, it ends with Jesus saying that He comes back and every eye shall see Him, "And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep and the goats." If the rapture happened at the end of the tribulation period, at least for sure, then there would be no need to separate sheep from goats. They would be separated at the rapture, so the rapture is seven years before. There will be people saved in the tribulation period, but it will be a very dark, difficult time and most likely they will die during that period, but they will be saved and get to go to heaven. But there's no need for separating sheep from goats, that would've happened at the rapture, so the rapture must be sometime before the time of tribulation.

Now, here's question three, how shall we then live? So, he gives us the first reason, verses 4-5, that we will not go through the tribulation period, it's darkness, we're children of the light, children of the day. And, then he tells us how we should then live, verses 6-8. Follow with me, "Therefore let us not sleep,"—again, 'us.' Paul's including himself. He's talking to believers. The word "sleep" there in verse 6 is a different Greek word used for sleep that's used in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, which is referring to death of a believer's body, "sleeping." This is actually referring to a spiritual lethargy. Let us not therefore be lethargic, let us be awake spiritually. ". . . as do others"—that's the unbelievers, they're asleep, they're lethargic—"but let us watch and be sober." He's telling us how we should live.

Verse 7, "For they that sleep sleep in the night;"—unless you have my neighbors that kept me up last night. Pray for me. If you're that neighbor, could you please be quiet after nine o'clock? "For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night." Generally speaking, you sleep at night and this is when people party. They call them nightclubs. Have you ever heard of the word "nightclubs"? This is kind of the picture here. They go nightclubbing. They do it at night. They get drunk at night. They get wild at night.

That big brawl that just took place in Cincinnati, people beating up each other in the street? Three a.m. in the morning! What were they doing drunk out on the street beating up each other at 3 a.m. in the morning? For heavens' sake, go to bed. Get some sleep. Again, it's using this imagery as conveying the idea that those who are nightclubbing are doing wickedness and unaware of the Lord's coming. We're children of the day, not children of the night. "For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night."

Verse 8, "But let us, who are of the day, be sober"—it means sober-minded—"putting on"—and in the Greek, it's once and for all, it's the aorist tense—"the breastplate of faith and love"—so we're soldiers now, we're putting on the armor—"and for an helmet, the hope of salvation"—that future phase of our salvation which is glorification.

Now, how shall we then live? Write it down. First, don't be sleeping spiritually, ". . . let us not sleep, as do others"—spiritual sleep, spiritual lethargy. Again, the parable of the ten virgins, be awake, be alert. Secondly, be watchful, verse 6; and be sober, verse 6, again a reference to it in verse 8. So, be not asleep, be awake, be sober-minded. Again, this is in the present tense, be continually vigilant and sober-minded. Don't get drunk on the things of the world. Don't let the world intoxicate you. Don't let the world press you into its mold. Thirdly, put on God's armor, verse 8, ". . . putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation."

In 1 Thessalonians 1:3, Paul was thanking God for the believers in Thessalonica for their faith, for their hope, and for their love. This is the Christian triad: faith, hope, and love. This is how we are to be living in light of the Lord's soon coming as we would put on a helmet, so as a soldier, put on the helmet of salvation. It's salvation's future hope of glory. This is how we're to live.

Now, here's point four, which gives us reason two. I hope I haven't thoroughly confused you. This is point four in the outline, and it is verses 9-10, the second powerful, clear, reason we won't be here for "the day of the Lord." Verses 9-10, "For God hath not appointed us"—notice 'us' referring to Christians, believers—"to wrath." Remember I told you the source of the tribulation is God? This is God's wrath. This is not a subject people like to hear about. Everyone wants to hear about the love of God, and that's a marvelous truth, but God actually will pour out wrath and judgment on a Christ-rejecting world.

"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." I believe this is a direct reference from Paul telling the Church we will not go through the tribulation period, we will not be here to experience "the day of the Lord." "For God hath not appointed us to wrath"—the word 'appointed' is a very strong term—"but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ"—then he comes to the cross, verse 10—"Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep"—most likely, it's whether we're dead or alive, dead meaning our bodies are in the grave, but we're in the presence of the Lord. Some feel that it's a reference to being spiritually asleep, but I believe that it's probably those, "whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him." Jesus said, ". . . he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall

he live.” So, he’s talking to us about “the day of the Lord,” that God has not appointed us to wrath. As I said, 1 Thessalonians 1:10, peek at it real quick, says that we are “ . . . to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”

So, twice in this book Paul tells us that we are delivered from the wrath to come. Again, in Revelation 6:16-17, it is a time of God’s wrath upon a Christ-rejecting world. But for us as believers, verse 10, Jesus took God’s wrath for us on the cross. Amen? “Jesus paid it all, / All to Him I owe; / Sin had left a crimson stain, / He washed it white as snow.” So, he makes clear that God’s wrath was poured out on Jesus at the cross. He took our place. He became “ . . . sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

Verse 10, “Who died for us”—this is substitutionary atonement, He died for us, He took our place. Why would He punish us and put us through the tribulation period. You know, if you’re a Christian, you stand perfectly justified before a holy God. Read Ephesians 5, “That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” I totally reject the idea that the Church must go through the tribulation to be prepared to go to heaven. The moment you were born again, you were righteous before God. Positionally, you’re not going to get any more righteous no matter how long you walk with God, no matter how holy you live. His righteousness is perfectly imputed to you. So, when the Church gets caught up to be with the Lord, it’s like a bride without blemish and without spot.

You know, I’ve done a lot of weddings. I’ve stood on this stage and seen hundreds of brides come down the altar to get wed. I’ve never seen one dirty, filthy, raggedy, beat up, messed up. I certainly have never seen a groom beat her up before the wedding. She doesn’t come with dirt, she doesn’t come disheveled. I’ve seen grooms look like that. I’m like, “Whoa, dude, you think you’d better fix yourself up a little bit.” Brides are always beautiful. They spend three days getting ready. They have a whole team of helpers. It’s unbelievable. Let me tell you, Jesus is going to bring His Bride home. We’re the Bride of Christ. We’re the Bride of Christ, and His precious Bride has been redeemed by His blood through the work of the Cross. He’s going to catch us up to be with Him, and we shall forever be with the Lord.

In closing, verse 11, this is point five. How shall we then live? Verses 4-5, the first reason, “Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day.” Reason two, verses 9-10, “For God hath not appointed us to wrath,” and then it closes with how shall we then live, verse 11, “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do,”—fellowship. For you to put into practice verse 11, you must be connected to other believers. We must live in fellowship with others in the family of God, the church. Amen? And, you’re to be commended for being in church tonight. I love when the service is over that people pray for each other, that people encourage one another, that people exhort one another, people open their Bibles and build up and edify one another because that’s what we’re supposed to do in light of the Lord’s coming.

First, “Comfort yourselves together,” verse 11, through fellowship. Secondly, “ . . . and edify one

another,”—the Word of God, prayer, love, and service. You minister to one another. I love what Charles Swindoll said about verse 11. Listen to the quote. “The Apostle Paul doesn’t conclude with a panicked warning: ‘The end is near! Get ready for the tribulation!’ Instead, he says, ‘Here’s how you live in the present in light of the future, knowing that Christ is your rescuer, not your executioner.’ No wonder Paul urges his readers to continue to encourage and build each other up with such good news. God hasn’t appointed believers for wrath either in an eternal hell or in a seven-year tribulation, rather he has destined us for rescue to heaven and an eternity with Christ.” I say, “Amen, and amen, and amen!”

In closing, let me just bring together the contrast that Paul gave us in this text. Believers are living with knowledge; they know. We don’t need to know the times and the seasons. Remember when they said to Jesus in Acts 1, “Is this the time You’re going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. 8 But ye shall receive power . . . and ye shall”—go into all the world and preach the gospel. So, we know that. Unbelievers are living in ignorance. Believers are living in expectancy; unbelievers will be caught by surprise like a thief in the night. Soberness, believers are sober-minded keeping their focus on God; the unbelievers are drunken in the night. The believers are likened unto light, daytime; the unbelievers are darkness, night time. The believers are saved from wrath; the unbelievers are awaiting God’s judgment and God’s wrath.

Again, this is just a little kind of glimpse of Paul’s teaching of that “God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation.” I actually believe these entire eleven verses are clearly teaching the Church will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air before God will pour out His wrath upon this Christ-rejecting world. Let’s pray.