

# Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Epistle, Year A

BEWARE OF THE LURE OF THE NIGHTLIFE

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Bill White

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! 4 But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; 5 for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. 6 So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; 7 for those who sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

DIAGNOSIS: Dying in the Darkness of the Nightlife

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Tempted, because of the delayed parousia, to return to the nightlife.

Like small children whining in the back seat of the car, "When are we going to get there?" It seems some of the Thessalonian Christians are whining, "When is Jesus going to get here? We're

getting tired of this persecution. We're tired of the Christian life and tired of the way the world is talking about us and treating us! When is Jesus going to get here so we can get our reward!?!"

These Thessalonian Christians have become selfishly impatient, frustrated, and disillusioned, and are now tempted to abandon the life of being children of light and children of the day (v. 5), in favor of a return to the sinful "nightlife" (v. 7).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): For those living the nightlife it is too dark to see.

This delay in Jesus' return to fulfill his kingdom is tempting these Thessalonian Christians to "fall asleep" (v. 6), that is, to give up on the faith and fall back into the life of sin. People with no faith in Jesus are people "of the night" or people "of darkness" (v. 5). Looking at their experiences in this world through faithless eyes they see no evidence to support the truth of the gospel. The devil whispers in their ears over and over again, "Say it. Just say it: 'I don't believe anymore.' 'I just don't believe anymore.' Say it. You know this Christian faith stuff is not true. Jesus is not coming back because none of the stuff Paul taught is real. C'mon, say it. 'I don't believe anymore.'"

Those living in darkness are living apart from the Light of the world, Jesus Christ. Living in darkness, they cannot believe Jesus' promise to return because their faith is elsewhere.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Those living in the darkness of the nightlife are destined for wrath.

Paul reminds the Thessalonian church of what they already know. The day of the Lord will come at an unexpected time. When it does come it will mean sudden destruction for those living in darkness. For them there will be no escape (vv. 2-3). On the day

of the Lord the wrath of God is real for those who do not have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### PROGNOSIS: Living in the Daylight of the Light

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Light in the darkness.

But Paul also reminds the Thessalonians that God has not destined them for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 9), the One who died for us (v. 10a). Those who trust the promises of Christ crucified and risen need not fear the wrath of God nor the impending day of the Lord. Why not? Because their faith is in Jesus Christ, the Light that shines forth in this world darkened by sin, death and the devil. AND the Light has overcome the darkness!

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Children of the day-Light.

Moreover, Paul says God has graced you Thessalonian Christians with faith in this Light of the world, Jesus Christ. This faith silences the voice of the devil in their ears. This faith IS real and trumps all doubts. This faith lights their way, empowering them to see the world with eyes of Christian faith and to walk as children of the day. Clinging to faith in the Lord Jesus, they are empowered to “put on the breastplate of faith and love”, and the “helmet the hope of salvation” (v. 8). This faith gives the blessed assurance that whether they are “awake or asleep” (alive or dead) when the day of the Lord comes, they will live with him (v. 10b).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Living in the day-Light.

By God’s gracious gift of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, these Thessalonian Christians (we too!) are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be patient and faithful—not discouraged—in waiting on

the day of the Lord. What is more, the Spirit empowers them to encourage and build up others in the faith (v. 11), and to live their lives in the Light of Christian faith, love, and hope.