

## Rescue

### Weekly Devotion #3

Below is a short devotion based on the Week 3 Devotion questions in your Renew: Session 3 handout. You'll get the most out of this devotion if you answer the questions yourself first. The goal is not for you to have the exact same response, but to understand the correct meaning of the Biblical text and then apply it personally in a way that uniquely helps you grow in your knowledge, love, and worship of God.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. (2) For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night....(4) But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. (5) For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. (6) So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober...(8) But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. (9) For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ...(11) Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

"The day of the Lord" is a common way for Biblical writers to talk about the return of Jesus Christ. According to what the Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5, this event will be experienced differently depending on how we relate to Jesus. For those who live in the darkness of not knowing Jesus and His salvation, He will come like a thief in the night and like labor pains upon a pregnant woman – it will be sudden, seemingly without warning, and painful. Jesus will be bringing God's wrath upon these people. Why? Because, apart from Jesus, all of us deserve God's wrath because we are all sinners who have rebelled against our holy and loving Creator. We talked about this in our most recent Renew class during the discussion on propitiation. But there's another angle from which we can understand this. In his book, *Exclusion and Embrace*, Yale Professor of Theology, Miroslav Volf, explains God's final judgment like this: "God will judge not because God gives people what they deserve, but because some people refuse to receive what no one deserves; if evildoers experience God's terror, it will not be because they have done evil, but because they have resisted to the end the powerful lure of the open arms of the crucified Messiah." This is looking at God's judgment from the other side of the same coin. In one sense, God is willing that people who continue in rebellion against him should be punished – they will indeed "get what they deserve" because they have done evil. But, in another sense, as the Apostle Peter says, God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). That's why God sent his Son on a hero's journey – to rescue us from the judgment we deserve by taking it on himself. And now he stands with open arms calling for people to run to him and be saved from the coming wrath. And so, for those who have accepted the embrace of these open arms, **for those who now live in the light of Jesus and his salvation, the return of Christ will not be painful, it will be joyful.** And, although none of us know the exact timing, it should not be surprising, it should be expected.

So, in light of the sure reality of Christ's return, how then should we live? This passage gives us 3 answers. 1) We should be **awake and sober**. In other words, we should not allow any amount of prosperity, peace, and security in our circumstances or in the world around us to make us lazy, distracted, or naive in following Jesus. We should live with the sober reality that the world around us is never really as peaceful, prosperous, and secure as it might seem. And we should live like Jesus could return at any moment and when he comes we want him to find us being faithful (Luke 18:8). 2) Like battle armor that not only protects us, but also identifies us to the rest of the world, we should be living every day with **faith, hope, and love**. Being sober about the impending return of Christ should not make us fearful, paranoid, divisive, and uncaring. Our faith in Christ and hope in his return shouldn't selfishly drive us into doomsday bunkers where we lock the rest of the world out. It should lovingly drive us out of our shelters to compel the rest of the world in before it's too late. 3) We should **encourage and build each other up**. The truth of Christ's return shouldn't be weaponized to tear other Christians down because of minor disagreements on things like timing and the meanings of different symbols. The truth of Christ's return should be a light that we hold up to help our fellow brothers and sisters see their final destination so that they have the courage and confidence to keep moving forward in following Jesus. Sober wakefulness, a faith that's full of hope and love, and encouragement for your fellow followers of Jesus – these are the defining characteristics of someone who truly understands and longs for the coming day of the Lord. The question is, do these characteristics define you?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, in your great merciful love, even though we deserve it, you have not destined us for wrath – you have destined us to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you! Forgive us for allowing the comforts or even trials of this life to make us sleepy in our relationship with you. By the power of your Spirit and your Word, wake us up to the reality of Christ's return and give us an attitude of eager expectation. But also forgive us for twisting the truth of Christ's return into a weapon that we use to judge our brothers and sisters or a shelter that we use to shut the rest of the world out. By your Spirit, pour out your love into our hearts so that we might bring others into this shelter of Christ's salvation and then build them up once they're here. In short, make us more like Jesus. Give us open arms like his. Move us to receive others as he received us. We ask these things in his name, Amen.