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Some Reassurance for Children of Light

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TEXT: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (ESV)

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. 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. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

The other day, I noticed a woman wearing a sweatshirt that boldly stated, "I need reassurance." It struck a chord within me—don't we all, at times? As humans, we often grapple with insecurities and uncertainties, seeking constant affirmations and supportive words from others. These reassurances can range from how we present ourselves, whether we are liked or loved, the challenges we encounter, our progress on ongoing projects, or the decisions we need to make. Some of these concerns may appear trivial, prompting us to chuckle at ourselves. However, others are deeply distressing and weigh heavily on our hearts. Then there are the weighty, existential matters that I haven't even touched on in this initial list—matters like our mortality. The question of what happens after we pass away is a significant concern for many. This question leads

to another significant issue that troubles Christians and non-Christians alike: What happens at the end of the world? How about Judgment Day? Pondering these matters can invoke deep consternation and make us feel uncertain about our position before a higher power.

Paul, in today's letter, offers reassurance. His assistant Timothy, sent to assess the well-being of the new Thessalonian congregation, reported back to Paul that these new Christians were doing fine, but they were anxious and bewildered about their future. They held some familiarity with the writings of the Old Testament prophets, which predicted a day of judgment and destruction—the Day of the Lord—where the wicked and disobedient would face punishment. These prophecies led these Christians to question their worthiness. Have they done enough to evade such an outcome? I've encountered numerous Christians facing a similar struggle, expressing sentiments like, "I hope I'll be alright. I think I've been good enough, but to be honest, I'm not entirely sure if I've been a good Christian. I've been unfaithful and made numerous mistakes. Perhaps I'm just scraping by in God's sight. I don't know." It's a distressing way to spend one's days in this world.

In addressing these anxieties, Paul reassures them that there's no need to be fearfully vigilant about the signs of the approaching end times. Jesus had indicated that only God knows when the end times will come, and it will arrive unexpectedly, akin to a thief in the night. Yet, it will undeniably happen. It's a solemn revelation that while many non-believers are currently relishing a false sense of peace and permanence in the world, they will face the approaching judgment as sudden, destructive, and inescapable. This concept of God's wrath can be disconcerting for some. However, it's essential to understand that in Scripture, God's anger is never random or malicious, unlike human wrath. It represents His steadfast opposition to all evil in a world that was once perfect. When humans deviate from God and work against His intentions for themselves and the world, He doesn't immediately punish them; rather, He allows room for repentance. As Scripture states, He is patient and abundant in love. But when there's no repentance, no turning back to God and belief in His Son Jesus Christ, eventually, God reaches a point where He says, "Enough." C.S. Lewis encapsulated it well: "There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'All right, then have it your way.'"

Paul continues, distinguishing believers from those who don't follow Christ, underlining the assurance Christians have about their future through two key aspects: their status and their destiny. First, he addresses our status in Christ. He emphasizes that believers are not in darkness to be unpleasantly surprised by the impending events, likening it to a thief in the night robbing them. Darkness symbolizes the domain of sin, evil, and separation from God. It's described as Satan's dominion in Scripture. In this world, some live in darkness without the light of Christ, stumbling in confusion, lost in their understanding of God and life, unaware of right and wrong, and perhaps adhering to other gods and idols, such as materialism, power, and pleasure. Jesus pointed out that some of these individuals even prefer living in darkness. "This is the judgment," he said. "The light has come into the world, but people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. Everyone who does wicked things hates the light and avoids it to prevent exposure of their deeds."

Paul further proceeds to remind the Thessalonians and us about our status, who we are in Christ. He emphasizes that because of Jesus and our relationship with Him, we are no longer under the sway of darkness. Instead, we are all children of light and belong to the day, living in the realm of God's light and salvation. Jesus is the light of the world, and those who have embraced faith in Him now dwell in the light of Jesus Christ. Amidst the darkness of the world, you belong to Him, citizens of His kingdom of light, attained through faith in Christ, who sacrificed and rose again to deliver us from sin, death, and the dominion of evil. Consider yourselves delivered, redeemed, and transferred to His kingdom of light. Another New Testament letter conveys Paul's message similarly: "He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Hence, followers of Jesus belong to the light and the day, not the darkness and the night. Your future is fundamentally bright.

Additionally, Paul encourages believers to confidently embrace who they are as children of light and day while they await Christ's return. Walk in the light of Christ, serving Him confidently and dedicating yourself to the cause of the gospel, always understanding your identity. He elaborates on the importance of wearing the armor of faith, which involves firmly trusting in Christ for salvation and seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance and support.

While we anticipate the return of Christ, we are encouraged to engage in prayer and daily study. He emphasizes sacrificially loving others, following in Jesus's footsteps, who loved God wholeheartedly and treated neighbors with the same love as himself, spreading the message of God in Christ. There lies hope in the confidence that God is in control and holds the final say over us and the entire world. Although it might seem daunting, children of light are securely held in the strong hands of God, and nothing can snatch us from that grasp.

"Amen. Amen." And a voice answered him, "Dad, it's me." Then the boy added these priceless words, "I told the other kids not to worry. I told them if you were alive, you'd save me, and when you saved me, they'd be saved too, because you promised. 'No matter what, I'll always be there for you.'" Listen, friend. God, our Heavenly father, has made the same promise to those who trust in His Son, Jesus Christ, who reassures us with these words: "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe in me. In my father's house, there are many rooms. What I have told you is that I go and prepare a place for you. If it weren't so, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself. That where I am, you may be also." And Jesus also promised in that same talk with his disciples, "I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you." So yes, the rocks will tumble. Yes, the ground will shake. Yes, there will be a great tribulation. But the child of God need not give in to fear and hopelessness. For we are promised: Our father will come to us and take us to be with him forever. Good news. Reassuring. But notice Paul doesn't end his thoughts here. There's a final word to his fellow Christians. He says, "Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing." The troubles and challenges of this life have a way of chipping away at our faith and confidence, turning us into anxious and uncertain people.

It's just a fact. We tend to leak hope. As Christians, therefore, we have the God-given responsibility to help each other out along the way and build each other up in the body of Christ. With these reassuring words that Paul has just given us today. Oh, how we need words like these from one another in Christ's church in order to confidently carry out the mission he's given us until he returns. For these words comfort and encourage and strengthen and keep us focused on the big picture of God and where it's all headed. As your brother in Christ and as a preacher of the gospel, I hope I've done that for you today. Or maybe reawakened you to come back to Jesus if you've strayed from him. I've done my job, as Paul has instructed me. Now, I encourage you to do your job: to always

be ready and available to encourage others in your church with the reassuring words about whose we are in Christ, children of Light, and where we're headed. Amen. Let's pray. Lord, we thank and praise you for the reassurance you've given us in your Holy Word today. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, help us to cling to it and be ready to share it with our fellow believers, as well as those who have not yet come to faith in Christ. In his name, we ask this. Amen."