

PERHAPS TODAY
1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

“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.”¹

At the initiation of each session of Parliament, the government through the Crown's representative, the Governor General of Canada, delivers a throne speech in which the challenges and aspirations of the government are outlined. In a similar manner, more recent tradition dictates that the President of the United States of America delivers the State of the Union Speech to a joint session of the Senate and the Congress in. In that speech the President proposes his agenda to the elected representatives and senators of the people.

An annual address in which the government recognises and responds to the challenges facing the nation is a tradition in most nations of the free world. Should there not be, then, a means by which leadership of a particular church can address the challenges facing that congregation, outlining the hopes and aspirations of congregational leadership for the coming year? Such a concept is not at all foreign to the churches of our Lord, and especially is that true among Baptist churches, for they are impelled by their polity to inform the congregation of challenges faced and the direction in which leadership hopes to lead the church.

Impelled by my responsibility to this assembly to give voice to a vision for the assembly, I now deliver the 2014 Throne Speech for **NEW BEGINNINGS BAPTIST CHURCH**. Certainly God has spoken through His Word. As an undershepherd appointed to this service and as a herald of His grace I have endeavoured throughout the brief time of our service together to deliver faithfully that message which is given to us as a community of faith.

As those who believe the Word of God, we are confident that God shall yet speak through His Word. To the lost, those yet outside the pale of Christ's love, no other message may be given except for a warning of coming wrath delivered with a plea that they should flee to the Son of God for refuge from divine judgement. To disobedient Christians we warn of divine discipline as the consequence of continued rebellion. With the author of the Hebrews letter we would caution any who are prone to disobedience, “See that you do not refuse him who is speaking.” Referring to those assembled Israelites who saw the awesome display of God's might, the author continues, “If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.” [**HEBREWS 12:25**]

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

To the church assembled, the message must ever be one which seeks to address the challenges facing us as a congregation and as a Community of Faith. The message must endeavour to outline broad hopes and aspirations of pastoral leadership as they seek to unite us in service to Christ. We want to build one another, making each believer strong in the Faith. But how may we accomplish that task? We want to exercise our gifts wisely as we serve one another in love. But how may we so serve? We long to see the lost saved and brought into the fellowship of Christ. But how shall we realise that hope? In order to address such challenges, I invite you to join me in review of Paul's words in his first letter to the Thessalonian saints.

At various times in the past, I have stated that I find an identity in several critical respects between this congregation and the Church in Thessalonica. The message has special significance to this congregation in my estimate. The first matter noted, and which is true of our day as well, is that **WE LIVE IN MOMENTOUS TIMES** [vv. 1-3]. It is easy to conclude that the inmates are running the asylum from even a casual review of the religious scene in North America. Spokesmen of the Faith are more frequently chosen and followed on the basis of personal charisma and rhetorical ability than they are chosen for fidelity to God's Word. As a result, the weird, the aberrant and the speculative frequently predominate in popular theology instead of the steady and the substantial. Therefore, we live in a day of urgency, a day in which solid teaching of the truths of God is lacking, and in a day in which sound instruction is sorely needed.

Two thoughts are immediately apparent from Paul's words in **verses one through three**. First, *strained interpretations of doctrines intended for the comfort of saints were even then being bandied about*. And second, in light of the hope of Christ's return there would be *a growing tendency to turn from teachings designed to inure against hardships, even as teachers would seek personal comfort as the age progressed*. Each issue needs to be examined in its turn to demonstrate the urgency of the hour and momentous times in which we live.

The doctrine of the return of our Lord is a precious comfort for the child of God. We believe that Jesus died, that He rose from the dead and that He ascended into Heaven from whence He shall return. The Christian dies in hope of the resurrection, not in a state of despair. This is true because the Christian, though living in this world, has fixed his hope on the world to come and therefore lives for God's glory. Already, at this early date in Church history there were individuals spreading the rankest myths concerning this precious doctrine of hope and comfort. Apparently some were teaching that loved ones who had passed on before would be left behind after the Lord came [see **1 THESSALONIANS 4:13 ff.**]. Others, Hymenaeus and Philetus to name two whom Paul denoted, were teaching that the resurrection was already past [see **2 TIMOTHY 2:17, 18**]. Yet other teachers were apparently teaching a spiritual resurrection [see **1 CORINTHIANS 15:35 ff.**]. Each of these was a strange, unwarranted eschatological teaching that sounded plausible.

Today, distortions of biblical teaching presented as truth are accepted by the unthinking and the unwary. A growing number of Canadians, some of whom may be fellow believers in the Lord Christ, appear to live for the present only. They tacitly adopt the idea of a spiritual resurrection, or at the least minimise the importance of the resurrection. Hence, they unconsciously adopt the view that this life is all that matters, thus destroying the hope of many. Others openly question the historic hope of the Church, the presence of departed saints with the Lord. There is for them neither accountability nor recompense, but only the pleasure of the moment. Yet others so emphasise the doctrine of the blessed hope that they deny the doctrine of service in the present. All such aberrations need to be exposed as unbiblical and destructive.

Another matter of significance deals with the expected response of believers to Christ's return. Too many today, though believing that Christ shall return, view that coming in a self-centred manner emphasising only their anticipated rewards. Like the Millerites of another century they set dates and map out times and boast of supposed superior knowledge as they ready themselves for His coming. The preparations have little to do with holiness of life or with rescue of the lost; instead, they dress themselves in robes of their own making and situate themselves where they wish to be while the work of God languishes. Yet others in derision ask, "Where is the promise of His coming?" [2 PETER 3:4a], ignoring the message of repentance.

Dear friends, Christ shall come just as He promised. The fact that His return has been delayed this long is a mark of divine patience toward our fallen race. Though we dare not assign dates and times we are to live our lives in anticipation, in expectation, in hope, knowing that His promise is sure. In the certainty of that knowledge we should be impelled to live lives worthy of His Name, endeavouring to rescue the lost even while building one another in this holy Faith. Our challenge is to provide sound instruction in the Faith even while living as a people whose lives have been changed by the hope arising from His presence. Our challenge is not only to know the truth but also to live the truth, thus serving as lights in a darkened world.

If you are taking notes, and I hope you are, the second point from Paul's concluding remarks, and again of vital importance for our own day, is that **WE HAVE GRAVE RESPONSIBILITIES** [vv. 4-11]. Knowledge confers responsibility, and how much greater is such responsibility when the knowledge possessed relates to judgement of our fellow man? For what we are has an impact far greater than we might imagine. Our lifestyle as believers should both strengthen fellow believers and attract outsiders to the Faith of Christ Jesus the Lord.

There is a strong phrase employed in the **sixth verse** to point out the responsibilities of believers. That phrase, *ára oun*, is translated in our English version, "So then." The English is such a common expression that it may easily escape our notice. However, the Greek phrase is a relatively rare expression in the New Testament, being used only by Paul; the phrase introduces an inescapable conclusion. It is a strong expression indicating a necessary logical inference from the information presented. As Christians we "are not in darkness," we are "children of light, children of the day." Therefore, certain activities should *necessarily* mark our service and our lives. The teaching of the imminence of the Day of the Lord should not surprise you. As Christians we are not only called but we are empowered by God to live as "children of light, children of the day." This means we *must* "keep awake," we *must* "be sober," we *must* "encourage one another," we *must* "build one another up." Each aspect of our responsibility as children of God that is mentioned is related to the proper response knowledge should elicit. Let's examine each feature in its turn.

Unlike "others," referring back to those "in darkness" and who are of "the night," we Christians are to be awake. This concept is best understood by way of contrast with the condition of those "in darkness"; those who are "of the night" are said to sleep. However, the word used for "sleep" in this passage, *katheúdō*, differs from the word used to describe the saints who have passed on, *koimáō* [see 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13]. The word here carries the thought of moral indifference, as is evident from the words of Jesus recorded in MARK 13:36 and from Paul's words in EPHESIANS 5:14. This is the condition of non-Christians; but Christians are to be awake. In particular, we who are Christians are to be mentally alert, watching for the return of Christ. We are to live in anticipation of His return, as Christ Himself taught.

You will recall that Jesus has warned, “Concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake” [MARK 13:32-37].

It is possible that some hearing the command to be mentally alert and to be watching for Christ's return view such charge as license to ignore all other Christian responsibilities. However, we are issued a further command which lends balance to our lives as believers in the world—we are commanded to be “sober.” Sobriety, in the Christian context, speaks of temperance, of self-control. The verb has a moral emphasis, condemning all forms of excess. As Christians we are to be temperate, avoiding all excess while living balanced lives. Christian lives are to be disciplined lives revealing the power of the indwelling Christ who is able to both change and to control that life.

The imperative of balance is not so very different from that implicit in John's first letter. “Little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” [1 JOHN 2:28-3:1]. Knowledge of God's program leads to a disciplined, self-controlled life free of moral taint. Knowledge of Christ's return induces moral alertness. Each believer should start each morning with the thought, “Perhaps today!” Live each day as though momentarily you shall stand in the presence of the returning Christ of glory.

The verses following the **sixth verse** provide an outline for being Christian in a world that does not value Christian ideals; the one who is Christian is to be alert and self-controlled. Alertness arises out of knowledge. At the practical level, if we are convinced of the imminence of His return, if we truly believe and are confident that He shall return instead of merely suspecting the possibility of such an event, we shall find that such knowledge impels us to stay awake. Christ's return is emphasised in **verses nine and ten**. I am confident that we need not fear passing through either the whole or a portion of the Great Tribulation, though I am equally certain that as Christians we may anticipate trials and testing. But on the basis of **verse nine**, I am confident that God redeemed us that we might be delivered from His wrath, and that His wrath shall be displayed against all who do not know Him. I am equally confident that Christ shall come again, and that believers shall dwell with Him, just as Paul has written elsewhere.

“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18].

Sobriety, on the other hand, is nothing less than the outward expression of the presence of what must assuredly be a familiar triad for the child of God. “Let us be sober” is the apostolic admonition, “having put on the breastplate of **faith** and **love**, and for a helmet the **hope** of salvation” [verse eight].

Faith, hope and love are frequently referenced by the apostle in his writings; the triad of graces is the necessary demonstration of the presence of the Holy Spirit working in power in the life of the child of God. As believers in the Christ, underscore one particular truth in your mind—*If the Spirit of God works in your life, faith, hope and love will be evident*. If God’s Spirit is not working in your life, regardless of how religious you may be, “faith, hope and love” will be but a vapid platitude that changes nothing.

Faith is confidence that Christ is indeed the Son of God, and that by His death He has provided salvation, and that by His resurrection He has provided justification for all who believe. That confidence begins with certainty that He has redeemed you by His grace.

Love is nothing less than that the believer’s adherence to the Lord God and the subsequent reflection of the divine character toward others, especially toward those of the Faith. Love, as you have come to know, is seen in obedience to the Word and in submission to God’s will. Where God resides, He expresses His divine character. The believer in whom Christ lives need not consult an analytical lexicon to prove that she is twice-born; Christ’s love is evident!

Hope is but the certainty and expectation that the Risen Lord of Glory shall fulfil every promise to His own. As Christian virtues, faith, hope and love should mark each believer’s life. The self-controlled life is evidenced in the presence of these graces.

As a significant aside, the emphasis on hope was first sounded in the opening words of this letter. “We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” [1 THESSALONIANS 1:2, 3]. Hope is central to the theme of the letter. In the opening sentence we discover that faith results in work, labour is prompted by love, and steadfastness is inspired by hope. Moreover, such graces and their subsequent expressions are evidently inherent and not incidental to the life of Christian obedience. The one who neither desires to work nor wills to exercise his or her gift among the people of God knows nothing of faith. The supposed believer who is unwilling to labour for the cause of Christ knows nothing of the love of God. The individual presenting himself or herself as a child of God who yet refuses to endure hardship is ignorant of hope. Such patent falsehood must be exposed for what it is and not permitted to continue unchallenged among the faithful. There is no gift of warming a pew; neither does Christ call His holy people to a life of great ease. The Christian life, if it is real, demands the wholehearted investment of gifts and energies.

This leads to two final imperatives demanded by our position as “children of light” and “children of the day.” Christians are to “encourage one another and build one another other up.” These imperatives are not impressed upon a segment of the Body; they are universally binding upon each Christian as is evident from the reciprocal use of “one another.” We are to “encourage one another.” Encouragement is the assured result as believers stand fast in the Lord [see 1 THESSALONIANS 3:8], as believers endeavour to live balanced lives honouring God the Father [1 THESSALONIANS 4:1], and as believers continually remind one another of the imminence of Christ’s return [1 THESSALONIANS 4:18]. Knowledge of the imminence of His return leads to mental alertness and encourages others; we stand together in our common Faith, and we are encouraged.

The other imperative in the text commands Christians to “build one another up.” An incessant emphasis in this day insists that we must build ourselves up. Self-help books are guaranteed to be best sellers. Public schools from earliest days teach Canadian children to seek personal fulfilment, to engage in self-discovery; nevertheless, such concepts are foreign to the New Testament. Despite the popularity of the cult of counselling leading to self-fulfilment and the charismatic emphasis upon self-achievement, the Word of God stands unchanged in its emphasis upon Christian responsibility to “build one another up.”

I am aware that when I gather with God’s people for a service to worship God I anticipate receiving instruction and encouragement in the Faith. Nevertheless, I insist that I share in the life of the Church in order to build up others as much as I share for my own benefit. I am quite certain that no benefit shall accrue to me if I fail to exercise my gift to build others.

As an elder for this congregation, appointed and approved by God as such, I am convinced that my ministry will be of scant value if I fail to equip you, the people of God, to obey these apostolic injunctions. Should I fail, whether through timidity or through ignorance, to call you to live your lives in the light of the imminence of His coming, I can claim no success in fulfilling my calling as undershepherd. If I fail to lead you to live lives which are self-controlled, balanced and fruitful as you serve Christ the Lord I must recognise that my ministry of instruction and oversight will be judged a failure. If we fail to encourage one another and to build each other up, pastoral leadership has failed its assigned responsibility. I bear that divine appointment with all due seriousness; I feel the solemn weight of that responsibility.

Therefore, if I would fulfil my responsibility as God’s undershepherd I must speak pointedly of how such teaching relates to us as a congregation. I can assure you that whether for long years or few remaining in my service before God I shall endeavour to instruct each individual in his or her responsibility to exercise given ministries with even greater care and diligence than I have in the years past. But instruction alone is insufficient to accomplish the work which lies before us; there must be a willingness to implement the knowledge provided. There must be a common vision which is readily understood by each member of the Body.

I recall speaking with a lady who told me of her pastor’s desire to evangelise the community in which her church was located. However, in his zeal to accomplish this work, that pastor was incapable of or unwilling to see the individual. Therefore, week-after-week he stood before the congregation challenging them to win the lost. I responded when the woman queried me about her pastor’s challenge, “The way you win a community to Christ is one person at a time.” Focussing on individuals, we will touch the greatest number of people. I hold the opinion that evangelism is caught, not taught. I may speak at length of the challenges facing us as a community of faith, but until we share the common vision of every member evangelism there is no possibility that we can fulfil the assigned task. We are responsible to know both the challenge facing us and how we, as individuals, fit into the ministry that will meet the challenge.

I propose to you that there is need to be alert to the pending return of our Lord Jesus Christ. This means that we are responsible to watch and pray. This means that regular corporate prayer is a necessity for the congregation. If we do not believe in such corporate prayer, what possibility is there that we can be united in our anticipation of His return? In this vein, there is need for universal, in-depth study of the Word of God. Certainly there must be sound instruction from the pulpit, but there is need for multiple classes to first instruct the saints in the truths of God’s Word, whether offered as Sunday School or by means of home Bible studies.

By these disciplines we not only create an atmosphere of awareness of the proximity of Christ's return, but we also provide sound, biblical instruction for believers in the exercise of their several gifts within the assembly. We offer teaching for children at a level of communication that they can grasp. Now, there is need for teachers for our children in Children's Church. We are providing training opportunities in various locations in our communities. Now, there is need for dedicated, capable instructors to initiate home Bible studies in multiple locations within the communities we serve. There is need for individuals to host such studies in their homes. There is need for those participating to invite their friends, neighbours and colleagues to attend these studies with them. We communicate prayer requests to our prayer warriors who carry these various requests before the Lord each week. Now, there is need for a prayer co-ordinator to both inform us of prayer needs and to provide the means whereby we may meet for prayer.

Each Christian who accepts the apostolic challenge must be taught to engage in personal ministries that ensure we encourage one another and that ensure that we build one another up. The weakest saint among us should know experientially the love of the entire Body, realising that our concern is more than kind or solicitous words spoken on a Sunday morning. We are obligated to break out of our comfortable capsules of Christian casualness so that making ourselves vulnerable to God's own people, we build one another up in this most holy Faith. We must train ourselves to be bold, speaking to one another, encouraging one another to participate in the ministries represented within the congregation, even as we encourage each other to exercise that particular ministry we each received from the Holy Spirit when we believed.

Paul speaks of encouraging "one another," and he speaks of building "one another up." In either instance "one another" is translation of different words in the Greek text. In the first instance, "one another" is translation of *allalōn*; the word means exactly what is translated—"one another." In the latter instance "one another" translates *heīs tòn hēna*, quite literally "one the one." In other words, the work of building one another up was more than incidental to the life of the apostolic church—it was central! The language makes it obvious that individual is to build individual, not depending upon the broader ministry of teaching and preaching to accomplish this vital work. If as a professing Christian and if as a member of the church, you are not investing your life in building up others, you are disobedient to the work Christ assigns.

You must be encouraged to do that particular work which is assigned and is yours alone. However, the ministry of building each other is ours together—it is a collective work. Very candidly this is our first responsibility as a people of God. I have often said, and I am convinced of the veracity of the statement, that the first responsibility of the church is not to evangelise—to fulfil the Great Commission, the first responsibility of the church is to be worthy to evangelise. We cannot anticipate that we will have power with outsiders if we fail to do the work of the ministry within the context of the Body. In short, we are creating the environment within the Body which makes outsiders know the warmth and reality we share; and we do so through encouraging one another and through building one another.

There is one further word 'ere I am finished with this message. I dare not fail to apprise you that as Christians **WE ARE ASSURED OF VICTORY** [vv. 9, 10]. Paul, ever the encourager of God's holy people, assured the Thessalonians that God's purpose for them was salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Whether we should be called to experience death or whether we should be required to labour in life, we are assured that we shall live together with Him.

The days are particularly dark in our fallen world. Animosity toward conscientious Christians appears to be growing in our world. Christians are one of the last identifiable groups against whom discrimination is permitted. Attacks from surprising quarters arise with regularity. Some news anchors can barely disguise the rage in their voices whenever they speak of matters impinging on expressions of the Faith. Commentators on news shows feel free to define what Christians should believe—and they discard any reference to the authoritative Word which God has given His holy people.

I'm no prophet; I make no claim to being able to predict events occurring in the next few moments, much less predicting what will happen in the coming year. Nevertheless, I anticipate increasingly bellicose acts toward people of faith and increasingly vociferous expressions of rage toward every expression of the Faith. I need to be on record as saying that if you are looking for an experience in which everything goes well for you and everyone loves you, don't become a Christian. Or if you do profess Christ, don't live a godly life. The apostolic warning has not been rescinded, so far as I know. Paul warned, "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" [2 TIMOTHY 3:12, 13].

What we witness in North America reflects growing hostility toward those of the Faith throughout much of the world. This past week, a Syrian priest stated in a matter-of-fact voice, "My people are beheaded, because they are Christian." He went on to bemoan nuns taken hostage, because they are Christian. Ten percent of the Syrian population was Christian before the influx of foreign Al-Qaeda fighters. Today, the Christian population of Syria is about three percent. Iraqi Christians are fleeing the country in the face of increased persecution. Coptic Christians in Egypt suffer persecution since the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood. Persecution of Christians is ongoing in Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Viet Nam, India, North Korea, Iran and even in Great Britain; opposition and persecution is increasingly noted in our world.

Opposition and persecution should not surprise any believer. Jesus warned His disciples, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause'" [JOHN 15:18-25].

The world is disquieted by the power vacuum created as the President of the United States attempts to conduct state business by deceit and stealth. Tyrants always stand ready to fill the power vacuum. Anticipating such conditions, the Master cautioned the Apostles to be alert. Seated near the Mount of Olives, Jesus said, "See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains."

In the times of turmoil and distress that are coming upon the earth, those who follow the Master can anticipate being treated as pariahs. The Master has warned disciples, “But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved” [MARK 13:5-13].

I’m fully aware that the words of the Master pointed to the days of the Great Tribulation; however, the days presaging those days will reflect what is coming on the earth. Great events cast a shadow before them; what is coming can be anticipated through the worldwide events we are now observing.

Dark days lie on the horizon. If you seek a comfortable religion that avoids exposure to calumny, opposition or outside stress, look elsewhere. However, when the dark days come, and they shall assuredly come to us, we need to take to heart the promise of the Master, “When these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” [LUKE 21:28].

How shall the follower of the Christ live in such darkened times? The Word through the Apostle to the Gentiles is unchanged. “Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

“Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” [ROMANS 13:8-14].

Yes, I am certain that dark days are coming. I am assured in my mind that casual Christians, those who play church, stand on the precipice of unprecedented terror and persecution. However, those who now walk with the Lord, those who are not pretenders to the Faith, need not fear what is coming on the earth. God’s promises to His holy people are multiplied throughout His Word. Our text assures those who follow the Christ, “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” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:9, 10].

John records a comforting promise given by the Risen Lord of Glory to the Church of the Philadelphians. This church represents the last epoch in the Church Age that exists immediately prior to the Laodicean epoch. These are the words of the Son of God, “Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. I am coming soon” [REVELATION 3:10, 11]. We are transitioning between these two epochs, if not actually already entered into the final epoch.

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Christians are not looking for wrath—we are looking for rapture! There may be trials—the Word is quite pointed in warning that such shall come—but as the Apostle to the Gentiles has stated, “We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” [ROMANS 8:37].

Perhaps you will recall the training the Apostle Peter provided to suffering believers who were of the Diaspora. “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And

‘If the righteous is scarcely saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?’

“Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” [1 PETER 4:12-19].

We stand on the edge of eternity. We stand on the threshold of victory.

Oh victory in Jesus, my Saviour forever,
He sought me and He bought me with His redeeming blood;
He loved me ‘ere I knew Him, and all my love is due Him;
He plunged me to victory beneath the cleansing flood.

Beyond the promised victory, we are certain that every exertion expended for His cause, every effort exercised in His Name, every encouragement extended another for His sake, shall be blessed. God is just, and He takes notice of His saints who toil for His Name’s sake. We shall not be forgotten; and we shall experience victory in His cause. Now, we walk with Him in the power of His Spirit as we commit ourselves to His service. Yet, we shall reign with Him in blessed glory. This, too, is our heritage. Amen.