

X R D S

WEEK 3

THE COMING KING

Brothers and sisters, we want you to know about people who have died so that you won't mourn like others who don't have any hope. Since we believe that Jesus died and rose, so we also believe that God will bring with him those who have died in Jesus. What we are saying is a message from the Lord: we who are alive and still around at the Lord's coming definitely won't go ahead of those who have died. This is because the Lord himself will come down from heaven with the signal of a shout by the head angel and a blast on God's trumpet. First, those who are dead in Christ will rise. Then, we who are living and still around will be taken up together with them in the clouds to meet with the Lord in the air. That way we will always be with the Lord. So encourage each other with these words.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (CEB)



CHILDREN
OF THE
LIGHT

THURSDAY

Spiritual armour for “children of light”

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:5-8, Ephesians 6:11-17

1 Thessalonians showed how, even before the gospels took their written form, the apostles taught what Jesus taught. It also previewed key ideas expressed more fully in later letters. Ephesians (which either Paul or one of his close followers wrote) took the 1 Thessalonians image of the spiritual ideals by which Christians live as armour for our hearts and minds and expanded it to a full-blown metaphor based on what Roman soldiers (some of whom guarded Paul during his imprisonments) wore.

Paul began this letter praising the Thessalonians for their faith, hope and love (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:3; also 1 Corinthians 13:13). As he neared the end of his message, he returned to those central spiritual qualities as the “armour” they could depend on to protect their life as children of light, not darkness. How has this pandemic season strengthened or weakened those qualities in your life?

N. T. Wright wrote, “The slogan ‘peace and security’ was one of the comforting phrases that the Roman empire put out, to reassure its inhabitants around the Mediterranean that the famous ‘Roman peace’...would hold without problems. That is what Paul is really attacking...Within 20 years of this letter, the warning had come true.” (Wright, N.T. Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians (The New Testament for Everyone). Westminster John Knox Press, p. 129. Kindle Edition). How, as a child of the light, can you avoid putting your deepest trust in any human entity?

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, keep teaching me that being a person of your light is not mainly about denouncing evil but about living with faith, hope and, above all, love. Fill me with that light. Amen.

SATURDAY

Continue building each other up

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11

Remember Paul’s statement of core Christian faith in 1 Thessalonians 4:14: “we believe that Jesus died and rose”? God’s intention for us, he said, has always been “salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” And how did God act to make that possible? We can write massive volumes analysing all the dimensions of God’s action, yet Paul summarized it in the simple phrase “Jesus died for us.” Jesus already fought and won the crucial battle against hatred, evil and death. The issue now is not can we defeat evil—Jesus already did that. All that remains is for us to choose whether we wish to be “in Christ” and share in that victory. And we get to do that together, “encouraging each other and building each other up.” Then, whenever Jesus comes, “we will live together with him.”

Scholar William Barclay movingly shared Paul’s closing message in this section: “[People] were anxious to know when that day would come. Jesus himself bluntly said no one knew when that day or hour would be, that even he did not know and only God knew (Mark 13:32; cp. Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:7). But that did not stop people speculating, as indeed they still do, though it is surely almost blasphemous that men should seek for knowledge which was denied even to Jesus ... only [one] who lives in the dark and whose deeds are evil will be caught unprepared. The Christian lives in the light and no matter when that day comes, if he is watchful and sober, it will find him ready. Waking or sleeping, the Christian is living already with Christ and is therefore always prepared... The [person] who has lived all his life with Christ is never unprepared to enter his nearer presence.” (William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians* (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, p. 206.)

How are you living, and helping others to live, prepared to meet Jesus?

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, thank you for the wonderful, comforting promise Paul shared with the Thessalonians. I look forward to being with you, and all those who love you, forever. Amen.