



Becoming a Model Church

Sermons from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians

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Jesus is Coming Back

ONLINE

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

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The Film, "Take Shelter"

A few weeks ago my wife and I sat down to watch the film "Take Shelter." It's about Curtis, an ordinary man with a good job, a stable marriage and one child, who has real scary dreams about the future.

He is convinced that a catastrophic storm is about to destroy the world. He loses his job because he is too distracted to work, he even builds a storm shelter in his garden, people around him are worried about the state of his mind. Things come to a head one day when he screams this warning at his local community:

*"There is a storm coming, like nothing you have ever seen,
and not one of you is prepared for it".*

Well one day the little family go on holiday to the sea. While they're building sand castles on the sand, his daughter notices an enormous storm brewing over the sea and coming in to land. And that's where the film ends, leaving you to guess what happened next.

People have always speculated how the world will end. And in a world gripped by Coronavirus fear, more and more people today are asking questions about the future, not only about their own future, but about the future of the whole world.

In our western culture, we tend to leave those sorts of questions to the scientists who say, Way off into the billions-of-years distance, the sun will run out of fuel and expand into a fiery red giant which will burn up the earth. Or, perhaps, closer in time, an asteroid will hit the earth and wipe out all life. Or perhaps humans will mess things up so badly that climate change will make life of earth impossible

Christians are not against science—most of the founders of modern science believed in God—but on this particular issue, science does not have the answer.

Christians believe that the world will end when Jesus Christ comes back to earth, and that's what I want to speak about in this talk. If Jesus-retuning-to-earth sounds far-fetched, please hear me out.

At Manor Park Church we've been making our way, Sunday by Sunday, through a short book in the Bible called "1 Thessalonians" and we're up to chapter 5, verses 1-11. It's a letter written 2000 years ago by a man by the name of Paul to a group of young Christians living in the city of Thessalonica (which you can still visit today, in modern day Greece).

Paul had preached the Gospel, which is the Christian message, in their city. You ask what the Gospel is, well we can describe it in five points:

- (1) That there is a God who created this amazing universe, and made you and me
- (2) We were designed to find our deepest joy and meaning in knowing and obeying God
- (3) But we've all walked out on God, we don't want him telling us what to do, we've turned to our own gods and paths, so that now our relationship with God is broken
- (4) But! In spite of turning our backs on him, because God is filled with mercy, grace and love, he devised a rescue plan to restore us to himself. He sent his Son the Lord Jesus Christ into the world, to die and pay for the wrong things we have done so that we can be forgiven, and then to rise from the dead to give us hope beyond the grave
- (5) And we must respond to this message. The health secretary said this week, that he wasn't giving us information, he was giving us rules to obey: stay at home. In the same way, the Gospel isn't mere information it's for obeying: we must trust in Jesus Christ and we must repent of our sins.

Many people in Thessalonica believed this wonderful Good News and their lives were completely turned around for the good. They turned from idols to God, from darkness to light, from hate to love, from fear to faith, and from despair to hope! The same thing happens today all over the world! When people believe this same Gospel their lives are made new!

And one of the biggest changes that takes place in a believers life is their new vision of the future. We believe that history will come to an end when Jesus returns from heaven, with his powerful angels to judge the world, to take his people home and to usher in the new heavens and new earth where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain or disease.

This is the Christian's greatest future hope! Not winning the lottery, or even seeing the grandchildren grow up, as wonderful as that might be, not becoming successful or famous, but Jesus Christ coming back to take us to our true heavenly home! It's an exciting vision! But it begs lots of questions! And because Paul was chased out of Thessalonica just weeks after arriving, he didn't have time to answer all the questions about the return of Jesus, so he answered some of them in this letter.

And what we find is that the questions they asked him are just the ones we ask as well:

- When will Jesus return?
- How can I get ready for his return?
- Will I be safe when Jesus returns?

Question #1 When will Jesus return?

When will Jesus return to Judge the world and bring history to an end? Give us a specific date!

Some Christians are speculating that the Coronavirus epidemic is one of the signs that Jesus is just about to return because in Luke 21:11, Jesus mentions “pestilences” as one of the signs of the times. And it could be! But Paul refuses to put a date on Jesus’ return because Jesus himself had said, “concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son but the Father only.” (Matthew 24:36). Instead, Paul gives us some facts about the return of Jesus Christ.

First, The return of Jesus will be unexpected, just like when a thief robs a house! “The day of the Lord will come like thief in the night.” (verse 2)

On New Year’s eve I went to the top of Kinver Edge with some friends to watch fireworks and welcome the new year in. While I was up there, thieves broke into our car. They didn’t text me or call me to let me know beforehand, so when we came down the hill at 1:30 am New year’s Day it was an unexpected surprise.

Jesus will return at a time when no-one expects him!

Secondly, The return of Jesus will be World-Changing, like when an army all of a sudden attacks a capital city and destroys it. “While people are saying “Peace and safety” destruction will come on them suddenly.” (verse 3) The Romans used those very words, “peace and safety” to describe their powerful empire. With an invincible army, they told themselves, we can rest in “Peace and Safety.” But in AD 410, the Roman world was changed forever when the Visigoth Barbarians took the city. In the same way, the return of Jesus will be world-changing. It won’t be a minor event, it will be world changing.

And thirdly, says Paul, The return of Jesus will be inescapable, just like a woman whose contractions have just begun and can’t escape childbirth. The signal that childbirth is on the way are those first contractions. From then on there is no getting out of childbirth, no escape. In the same ways say Paul, the return of Jesus Christ will be inescapable. “As labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.” (verse 3) No-one will be able to avoid the return of Jesus Christ and its consequences. There will be no place in the whole world to hide!

“I can’t give you a date” says Paul, “but I can tell you is that Jesus’ return will be unexpected, world changing and inescapable.”

It's a sobering thought. When Jesus returns, everyone alive will be caught up in the event. Even those who don't think they will, will!

But if we've got no specific date, how can we prepare? If we had an appointment time, we could "pack our bags" so to speak, the week before. In 2011 an American preacher falsely predicted that Jesus would return on the 21st May 2011! So some people sold their homes, gave up their jobs and spent their life savings advertising the date on these enormous billboards! Since they had the date, they could "get ready" or so they thought! But if we don't know when Jesus is returning, how can we "pack our bags?" That's our second question.

Question #2

How should I get ready for the return of Jesus

In Paul's answer he imagines two kinds of people, drowsy, night time drunks and alert ready to fight, day time soldiers. And he says - you need to behave like day-time soldiers, not night-time drunks.

"You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled putting on faith as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet." (verses 6-9)

How do I prepare for the return of Jesus Christ? I wake up, get out of my pyjamas, put on my spiritual armour and prepare for action, which means serving Christ actively in my family, my place of work, my neighbourhood, my needy world. (My guess is that Christians are going to have new opportunities to serve God in our neighbourhoods and nation as this pandemic unfolds). Which also means always remembering that I am in a spiritual battle against the devil who tempts me, against my sinful flesh which constantly wants to do wrong things, and the world which wants to squeeze me into it's mould!

Am I speaking to a sleepy careless Christian, still in your pyjamas! You need to wake up, put on your armour, fight the good fight and redeem the time for the days are evil!

How can we get ready for Jesus' return? Not by idle speculation about dates and times, but by living a godly and active life of service to Christ. The Thessalonians had one more question about the return of Jesus—which we also ask today:

Question #3

Will I be safe when Jesus returns?

Believers ask this question because the Bible says that Jesus is coming back to judge the world, "God has set a day when he is going to judge the world with justice, and he will use a man he has appointed to do this. God has given proof to everyone that he will do this by bringing that man back to life." (Acts 17:31)

“If Jesus is coming back to judge the world, will he judge **me**, will he punish me for the many wrong things I have thought and said and done? Will I be safe on that day?” What does Paul say? “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.” (9-10)

If you trust in Jesus, says Paul, you’ll be safe when Jesus returns! Because Jesus has already died to take away all your sins, when he returns you won’t be punished for your sins, but instead you will live together with Jesus and all his people, forever.

Believer: you will be safe!

Are YOU prepared for the return of Jesus Christ? You can be, by turning to God, by believing the Good News of Jesus Christ, by believing in Jesus Christ and by repenting of your sins. Our prayer at MPC is that many people in this season of pandemic will turn to God and find not only comfort for their fears but salvation for their souls.