

THESSALONIANS

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Life Group Study Guide | Holy Cross Church

WEEK OF OCT 21 - 25

OVERVIEW

Our passage discussed in this study is about the second coming of Jesus. God came to us in the incarnation of Jesus (we celebrate this during Advent), he comes to us regularly in our lives as we have communion with God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and he will come to us at the end of this present age when he will make all things new at the return of Jesus. This is known as the second Advent of Christ). And, depending on the person this future apocalyptic event can produce either hope (manifested in joy and encouragement) or fear (manifested through anxiety and discontent).

The Apostle Paul fast-forwards to the future to discuss the return of Jesus and the day of the Lord and how Christians can have hope in anticipation of this event—and how we are to live in light of this breathtaking reality.

OPENING DISCUSSION

Which of the following best describes your response to sermons, books, or movies about the “end times”?

- I end up feeling nervous and anxious
- It irritates me the way some people are so obsessed with apocalyptic themes
- I get excited and more motivated to live for Christ now and long for his return

The bible speaks clearly on the unexpected, unavoidable, and imminent return of Christ. In your opinion, do most Christians live as though this were true? Why or why not?

READ

Read through the text for this study, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

STUDY & APPLY

- 1. As you read Paul’s description of your future in verses 13-18, which word or phrase captures your heart most? Why is this personally encouraging to you??**
2. One of the issues the Thessalonians Christians are wrestling with is the issue of death. Put yourself in Paul’s shoes as he tries to tell them what is going to happen at the return of Christ. Paul is concerned that they learn appropriate Christian grief, instead of the hopeless mourning that typify pagan funerals. **How is the grief of Christians still truly grief but grief with hope instead of hopelessness?**

3. Verse 4:14 repeats one of the earliest Christian creeds, “Jesus died and rose.” Because we know he has defeated death and now has a new, resurrected body, we can have the same hope. The union between a Christian and Christ is so radical and permanent it is meant to be the bedrock basis of our identity, future hope, and present calling. What this passage invites us to do is to consider the kind of hope of the the gospel that is so much better than any alternative hope that the world has to offer to give us comfort in our future expectations. **What are some of these alternative hopes that you else the world has to offer? Which do you most often struggle to resist?**

Read together aloud a note on 4:16-17

Paul says in vv. 16-17 that the Lord will come down from heaven accompanied by various dramatic signs. The dead will rise and those who are alive will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. These two verses commonly have a huge influence in some circles where “the rapture” is assumed to be the main Christian hope, where people are snatched from their homes, jobs, cars, and airplanes, leaving the rest of humankind suddenly to endure in suffering. To read this passage in this way would be a mistake. The key is to realize what the death and resurrection of Christ means: it doesn’t mean disembodied ethereal existence with Jesus in some celestial heaven, but the re-embodiment of God’s people to live with and for Jesus in his new redeemed world. What Paul has in mind, by the words that he uses, is a king returning from victory to celebrate in the city with all his people who longed for his return. They did this often during the 1st century. When a king would come into the city the whole city would be transformed and meet the king as he entered the city with a great celebration. We will not meet Jesus and float around the clouds together. We will eat with him, drink, sing, laugh, and we will have the fullness of joy that has no end. But most importantly, as Paul narrows his focus, we will always be with Jesus and he will never be taken from us. Our hope, therefore, does not rest in our ability to preserve a good mood as we wait for Jesus but in Jesus’ ability to bear us up. Jesus will never abandon us and he will one day return to be with us in a way he has never been before.

4. The day of Christ’s return will be sudden and unexpected, preceded by confident declarations such as “There is peace and security”. The sentiment seems relevant also today. **Where in our current culture do you see the assumption that there is peace and security? Where are you most tempted to find peace and security outside of Jesus?**
5. For reasons of God’s own wisdom and goodness, he has chosen not to reveal the specific time of end-time events. **What could it mean for you to “watch and be sober” to better anticipate the return of Christ?**
6. Twice in our passage Paul urges believers to encourage one another in the community of faith with these words of hope and promise. **In what practical ways can you encourage and build up others in our church with these words?**

PRAY

Pray for your Christian community for the strength and courage to live out our future hope and present calling. Pray for one another who may be in a season of grief and build each other up, through prayer, to grieve but not as ones without hope.