**We Live With Him**

**1 Thessalonians 5:1-11**

Last Sunday of the Church Year

11.20.2022

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Were you paying attention to our epistle lesson? Paul begins by saying that we have no need for him to write anything to us in regard to the last days. He expects we understand things concerning those days.

Today is the Last Sunday of the church year, and again we are looking at things pertaining to those last days – the Last Days being those days before the return of Christ. At the time of Paul Christians were under persecution. They did not know what tomorrow would bring. They could be taken prisoner and persecuted by physical torture for their faith in Christ, maybe even a torturous and painful death.

It might appear that Christianity is under persecution here in the United States, but it truly is not! Do you fear for your life because you confess Christ? No! You might be afraid of talking about Christ because you may be ridiculed for what you believe. You might be called superstitious, simple-minded, brainwashed, or declared to be out of touch with reality. You may be told you need to step into the 21st century. But no, your life is not at risk.

Sadly though, how many Christians have given up the true faith rather than have to deal with even the ***mildest*** form of harassment for the truth of God’s Word.

It is because of the false security many Christians felt as citizens of this country, there are many who find themselves confronted with Satan’s work in the world and think the end is near. Numerous Christians look at the ways of the world – as they see them in their short view of history – and think that the end of the world has to be very soon.

I have had strangers note that I am a pastor, and ask me questions like, “Don’t you agree, it is just like the Bible says, the end must be coming soon?”

My response usually surprises them because I say that it has always been – soon – right around the corner. Jesus said we are to be ready – today.

I ask them what makes them think it is right around the corner? I ask them if they thought it was right around the corner ten years ago? If not then, then why more so now that then?

People point to things like abortion, issues with human sexuality, and the fact that Christianity in the United States is not as popular as it was. They are surprised when I tell them that those are not signs of the return of Christ.

We are to be ready today! It has always been such. Maybe the problem is more of complacency and sloth. We Christians often do not have the urgency that we should have – that today may indeed be the day. We should have more urgency in faith issues, we ought to believe – as did the early church – that today could indeed be the last day.

Every day you are called to defend our faith, to speak of the hope that is in you.

Every day you are called to live in faith toward God and love toward our neighbor.

The signs mentioned by Christ, and spoken of in other places in the Scripture are nothing new. Those signs were present at the time of Christ, and even before His incarnation. Some have been very evident at various times throughout history.

We have nothing like the black plague today, they must have thought the end was near.

Other places in the world might be experiencing hunger, maybe even starvation, but just because a pound of butter is about $4.00 does not mean we have a famine. There is enough food produced globally to feed the world. It is greed of some which makes other people starve.

We have nothing going on in the world like the Great War or World War II. Not a rumor of war – it was outright global conflict. How many then thought the end was near.

You are to be ready, today! Christ may return today, tomorrow, or any day in the near future. Or it may your last day breathing in this mortal flesh today, tomorrow, or any day in the near future. You are to live as if this might be that last day – whether it is Christ’s returns, or simply “your” last day.

We are to live in hope as we wait for that day, for God has not destined you or me for wrath. He has destined you for salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ died for you! Christ rose for you! So, no matter whether you are awake or asleep, you live with Him!

Do you understand what those two terms mean – awake or asleep at this point in our text? To be awake is to be alive and breathing in this mortal coil and human flesh, pinch yourself and you feel it. To be asleep is to have fallen asleep in Christ. Believers who have died in Christ are those described as having fallen asleep. It does not matter whether we are awake or asleep – breathing in this flesh or nor – we live with Him.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this means that a Christian celebration of life is much different than the celebrations of life which many people have when their loved ones die. The “celebration of life” that has come into existence the past few years when people die does not celebrate life. Such “celebrations” are only memorials – they remember the past of the one who is now deceased. Such events recall the “good-ole-days” of the deceased’s life. They do not look forward.

That is not a Christian celebration of life. That is a fatalistic, atheistic misunderstanding of life. This is how life is understood by those who do not know The Truth – those who do not know Christ. This is what life is to those who believe that death is the end.

This is an abomination to Christians.

When my mortal flesh ceases breathing, I will join the repentant thief on the cross in paradise with Christ. If I die before Christ returns, I will fall asleep with Jesus. I will be like that thief, with Christ in paradise. Those who have passed from this life in faith in Christ have joined Him in paradise, they live with Him in joy and peace. What that life is like, we are not 100% certain.

Those who have gone before us though, are still waiting. Yes, they are with Christ in paradise, but they are awaiting the last day. They live with Christ in the great hope of the Christian, that as Christ rose from the dead, they also will rise on the last day.

On that glorious day you and I will rise from the dead in our bodies, perfected and glorified in a way that we cannot even imagine in this life.

We will join Christ in His resurrection!

We will gaze upon our Redeemer with our own eyes in perfected and holy flesh.

What a joy it will be to enjoy the new heavens and new earth in glorified flesh on that last day. We will then live with Him in His eternal kingdom.

But until that day, we also live with Him.

We are not of the night, nor of the darkness. When we fall asleep at night, it is a different thing than the sleeping as mentioned in our text. There are some who are awake – that is, they are alive and taking in nourishment in their bodies – but who are also asleep. Their sleep is connected to darkness, it has to do with putting aside the things of the faith. Christ, His kingdom, the things of the faith, are not a part of their conscious thoughts on a regular basis – they are asleep. It is terrifying!

To be a Christian is an everyday thing. We live with Christ every single day! We live with Christ in how we treat others. We live with Christ in our daily prayers. We live with Christ as our thoughts and deeds are guided by His Word and His will.

It is terrifying to think about hose who put aside faith things except on Sunday mornings – they are near to falling asleep.

Those without Christ are sleep-walking, they are dead men walking.

Living with Christ, we are to encourage one another. We are to build one another up in Christ. We are to keep one another in our prayers. We are to encourage one another to be where Christ is, that we may be built up in Christ at all times.

The Lord's thoughts toward you, as mentioned in the introit, are of peace, not of evil. You heard Him come to you with that peace, from the lips of your pastor in a word of forgiveness. Peace is given in the word of absolution Christ purchased with His innocent suffering and death.

Christ comes to fill you with Himself, living in you to love your neighbor in this mortal frame, even as you live in the hope of His life at the resurrection.

We live with Him as He comes to us and makes His dwelling within us. We live with Him for He feeds us Himself – the very meal He places before us.

He lives with us and raises us in this life to hope in Him in all things. In Him you are strengthened to face each new day. You are encouraged by His life within you that you will overcome all trials and temptations, and at last attain eternal life.

We live with him, for He comes to us to keep us now and forever more. Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.