

Sunday Sermon November 12, 2017

Sermon Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Sermon Theme: Be Built Up and Build up

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ² for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

⁴ But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵ You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶ So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹ For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

I've spoken with many people who have built a house. The stories are all very similar. They are really excited to sign the papers and get the house started. They have taken time to pick out the features that they want, maybe they even designed something a little special that will make their house unique from the others on the block. Then as construction starts that excitement begins to grow as the foundation is laid and the house is framed. But that excitement doesn't last.

Whether it is delays in the construction, delays over permits, changes that need to be made the blueprints, or extra costs for this or that, somewhere along the way the process of building a house becomes less a joy and more a chore. All the people I have ever spoken with who have ever built a house have expressed doubt and frustration over the process and less and less joy.

This is all true until the contractor or real estate agent calls and finally says the house is done. That joy returns when the construction is finally completed and you are standing on the doorstep of the new home. Then the joy returns.

This process of building a house can be very similar to the stages we go through as a Christian. There may be many times that we are built up in faith, overjoyed about what is going on in our life. Maybe we just came to faith, maybe God gave us a great blessing, maybe we have enjoyed a wonderful worship service or festival. But then all the things that life throws at us eat away at that joy and happiness. We experience stress and strain, frustration and fatigue because life can seem so overwhelming.

Then we hear the Bible tell us that this world will not last forever. We hear our Savior tell us that he will come again to end this world and take us from this world to our true home in heaven. This wonderful message can be like standing at the door of a new house. All of the bad stuff has been forgotten because there is so much good we are looking forward to.

Today we look at Paul's words to the Thessalonians. Paul's words are all about the second coming of our Savior, Jesus. As we look at these words we will see that Paul is giving us encouragement as we wait for Jesus to come. He encourages us to Be Built up in the Word even as we Build Others up in the Word.

We are in the end times season of the church year. This End Times season focuses on the promises of our Savior to people who are living in the last age. This season fills us with hope because it sets our eyes on Jesus and his promises to take his faithful people with him to heaven.

Jesus second coming was a very common theme in the early Christian church. We might look back and think that they were a little foolish to think that Jesus was coming soon, but the signs of the end of the age were as real for them as they are for us.

There were certainly wars and rumors of wars. Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. There were natural disasters. Pompeii was destroyed by Mt. Vesuvius in 79 AD. Christians were persecuted for their faith and fled from Israel to other "safer" places in the Roman Empire.

It is only natural that Christians would cling in faith to the hope of Jesus' return. They believed that no matter when the end of the world came, that Jesus would take them home. This was their foundation of hope and comfort even as they faced the problems in their own lives.

Jesus' second coming was so important to them that they longed to know exactly when Jesus would come back again. Paul's answer to their question is our sermon text for this morning. He doesn't give them an exact answer because he doesn't know. He simply tells them to be ready, being built up in the Word.

In order to encourage this, Paul shows them the proper way to be built in the faith and the improper way. Paul first shows what is not a solid foundation. **While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁶ So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.**

Paul talks about people who can't even see the truths of God that are right in front of them. Paul says that it is like these people are asleep or unaware of the trouble and sinfulness in this world. They are claiming that all is well. They do not see the warning signs that God gives. They do not listen when God speaks in his Word. They love the world and the way it runs and see nothing wrong with a world that glorifies and encourages open, unrepentant sin.

Paul tells us, "**Do Not Be Like These**" who are unaware of what God says, as if they are asleep or their senses have been dulled by drinking. These people are not ready to meet their Savior because they do not have faith in him. They have put their faith in something else that cannot save. They will be surprised to Jesus coming again to judge the world because they believed in something other than what God says. Instead he tells us to be built wisely, to be ready for Jesus to come by being built up in the Word.

⁴ But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵ You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.

⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹ For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

Paul calls the Thessalonians, brothers, part of a large family of believers. This is the same family that we belong to. This family is not drawn together by ethnic backgrounds, blood relation, or genealogy, this family is brought together and is built into a spiritual house by Jesus' death and resurrection. We have been appointed to receive salvation through Jesus. Jesus died on the cross so that our sins would be forgiven and heaven ours. We have no need to fear the last judgment because we are part of this family of believers through Jesus. While we are here on earth Jesus' resurrection shows us we have nothing to fear. Because he lives we will live too. We do not need to fear violence, natural disasters or persecution because Jesus is so much more than these things. When Jesus' tells us the signs of the end of the age, we do need to hear them as God's call to his people to be ready, but he reminds us that he is still very much in control.

Since Jesus has given us this life in heaven, while we live on earth, we live as God's children who have been built on his foundation. Paul calls us sons of light or sons of day. We are not spiritually asleep because the Holy Spirit is at work as we regularly hear the Word in worship and Bible Study. We do not fall into a faith that is dull or unaware because the Holy Spirit keeps God and his Word as our top priority. As we hear the Word, the Holy Spirit keeps our focus on God and not all the things that life can throw at us. Not our own interests, concerns, or life matters. We are ready when we are standing firm in faith.

Paul even uses a picture of armor to describe those who are standing firm by being built up in the Word. We are to be in the Word so much, it's as if we are wearing that Word as spiritual armor. **Let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.** What is that armor supposed to do? That armor will protect us from the attacks and temptations of the devil.

There is nothing we need to fear when we hear the words about Judgment Day. The Holy Spirit builds us up and makes us ready in faith. We live like those early Christians did: expecting that Jesus will be back at any moment. God doesn't tell us to relax until he comes, he tells us we have a job to do; we are to be building others up with the Word, just as we have been built up with the Word.

Paul's closing remark to the Thessalonians is a note of encouragement, **¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.** There are really two ways we build others

up. The first way we accomplish this is when we encourage our fellow believer. We build each other up when we see each other in worship. It is an encouragement to see others who believe what we believe. It is an encouragement to share joys and troubles, when we look for reasons to love and care about each other rather than focus on the reasons we don't like one another. Look around at others this morning. Take a minute to look to the right and to the left. These are the same people who you will spend eternity with and that's an awesome thing. You will be in heaven with me and I with you. What a wonderful reason to build each other up with our words and actions.

We encourage our fellow members to continue to hear and study the Word of God. This means that we might need to get our hands dirty by calling someone we haven't seen in a week or two and saying, "Hi." That means that we will encourage people outside of our comfort zone, young and old, men, women and children. It is so important that children of light act as children of light to one another so that we do not give the devil an opportunity to tempt someone to fall asleep or be dulled in their faith.

There is also another part of this encouragement. What are we to do about those who are asleep or dulled in their faith? Jesus would say, "Get busy. You have work to do." We are to build others up through the Word, even those who need to hear about Jesus. This too is an awesome responsibility. God has put you here on earth to be the one who tells another person about Jesus so that they too might believe and be included in the hosts of heaven. Jesus would say, "Get busy. Building others up. There are many who need to hear."

As we see the end coming, may we be built up in faith to stand firm and may be builders ourselves, using the Word to encourage our fellow believers and reaching out to those who need to be woken up from their spiritual sleep. Jesus is coming. Jesus is coming soon. Amen.