

Sermon 1 Thessalonians 5 1 11 23rd Sunday after Pentecost Series A

Sermon: 23rd Sunday after Pentecost

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (v.9)

Theme: God's good plans for us

Goal: To be prepared for the day when God will accomplish His good plans

Dear Friends,

Introduction: God's plans for us are good plans. He doesn't want our condemnation, but He wants our salvation. The entire mission of Jesus when He came on earth had only one purpose: To save us from God's wrath and to give us life, eternal life. Jesus did this paying for our sins with His own life on the cross on our behalf. We are free from condemnation when we believe in Christ. I know that this is your faith and therefore we are gathered here in God's house.

But it is very easy to be distracted from our faith and from our hope. There are so many things happening around us, so many appointments which maintain us busy, so many attractions are calling our attention – that sometimes we lose the focus of our faith and of our hope.

The Apostle Paul gives directions to prevent us from leaving the right path, so that we would not lose the goal of our faith. His teaching is like a "prophylaxis" to avoid future damages in our life. It's an alert to warn us to be ready and steadfast when Jesus comes again. It is not to scare us, but to encourage us to wait for Jesus like we expect a friend or a relative to visit us on our birthday.

I – Suddenly

Paul uses two situations to illustrate when Jesus comes. One is about labour pains on a pregnant woman. The mother-to-be knows that she has to wait for about 40 weeks. This is a time of preparation and expectation. But she cannot determine when the pains begin. In spite of the anxiety and pains, the reward is great: a baby is born! –

This is just to illustrate that we have a time to wait for the coming of Jesus, we cannot give up, it will happen in the right time, and we have to be prepared!

The other illustration is a strange one: “You know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” Jesus used the same comparison. It doesn't mean that Jesus is a thief; but that He will come suddenly, when no one is expecting Him, - like a thief comes when none expects him. – When we discussed this at our Bible Study group, I asked the participants: How do you protect your home against a thief? One said: I set up the alarm before I go to sleep. The other said: I have burglar bars at my home; - and I added: plus a fence around the property. The other: We have neighbourhood watch.

What are the alarms, burglar bars, fences, neighbourhood watch we have to be alert when Jesus comes? His Word protects us. Through prayer we have a direct line connecting us to Him. Our Christian neighbourhood, - our Christian family like St. Thomas, - helps to watch over each other. The Holy Communion strengthens us in our fellowship and keeps us awake. God gives us right the conditions to be alert, even when we rest.

II – Our behaviour

Paul makes a list of attitudes we shall follow to be ready. Some of them are instinctive to a Christian. But we have to be reminded of them and value them highly.

A) “You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness... those who get drunk, get drunk at night.” – God called us out of darkness into His wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9). Paul wrote to the Ephesians (5:8): “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light

(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord". – Many Christians tend to "slip" into darkness from time to time. It's dangerous! Don't put yourself under temptations, but stay in the light.

B) "Let us be alert and have self-control (or: sober)." If we lose our control due drunkenness or get fascinated by the wealth and pleasures of this world (Matthew 13:22), we become blind to God's issues. "Be alert and have self-control" says Paul, so that this day should not surprise you.

C) "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 like a helmet." – *The Christian is to be on the defence against evil forces. Since the best defence is a good offence, God urges each Christian to put on faith and love as his breastplate and the hope of salvation as his protecting helmet. The Christian knows, indeed, that it is only the power of God's Spirit working through the Means of Grace that empowers him to "put on" these good gifts. Therefore, he realizes his need to live in utter dependence on resources that are not his own but come from the Spirit of God.* (Series A, p. 236).

III – God's goal

All of this has only one goal: "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 with him." God's plan is the best for us! He wants us to live with the resurrected Christ, whether we are awake or asleep. Remember the sermon last Sunday, when we talked about "those who have fallen asleep"? They live with the Lord as we live with the Lord. They had passed the pains and temptations of this life and won the victory, living with Christ forever in the church triumphal. We are still facing struggles and temptations in the church militant. But Jesus is with us

accomplishing God's plan to have us with Him forever as well. *In life or in death the Christian lives with Christ. The Christian's whole existence is centred in Jesus Christ* (Series A, p. 236). St. Paul says: "If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord" (Romans 14:8).

Conclusion: The words of conclusion of this text are similar to the conclusion of last Sunday's text: "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." I like this word "encourage". It's a strong word and shows action! Paul realizes that the brothers and sisters in Thessalonica were already encouraging each other. But he reinforces his appeal adding: "build each other up". Like stone beside stone and stone on top of stone, we have been building up as God's temple, not alone as lonely (or single) stones, but we are bound to each other by the cement of God's love.

Next Sunday is the last Sunday of the church's calendar. The following Sunday Advent begins again. This time of the year is especially reserved to preach about Jesus's second coming and to encourage the Christians to be alert. It doesn't mean that we don't talk about this the rest of the year, or that we shouldn't be alert the rest of the year. No! But the proximity of the end of the year gives us all a good opportunity to think about our life and our faith, about our relationship with God and with our neighbour: When Jesus comes, am I ready? The answer shall be: Yes, by God's grace! He called me to faith in Jesus and He gives me all conditions to be steadfast in the true faith and hope. We shall not be afraid or in doubt, but we have to rely on His promises and cling to His Word and the Sacrament. He has good plans for us. "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." Amen.