

SUNDAY 19 November 2023

Introduction

Hymn 642 - This day God gives me

**This day God gives me, Strength of high heaven,
Sun and moon shining, Flame in my hearth,
Flashing of lightning, Wind in its swiftiness,
Depths of the ocean, Firmness of earth.**

**This day God sends me, Strength to sustain me,
Might to uphold me, Wisdom as guide.
Your eyes are watchful, Your ears are list'ning,
Your lips are speaking, Friend at my side.**

**God's way is my way, God's shield is round me,
God's host defends me, Saving from ill.
Angels of heaven, Drive from me always
All that would harm me, Stand by me still.**

**Rising, I thank you, Mighty and strong One,
King of creation, Giver of rest,
Firmly confessing, Threeness of Persons,
Oneness of Godhead, Trinity blest.**

Greeting

The Lord be with you. **And also with you .**

Sentence of the Day

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Prayer of Preparation

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'

Jesus said: 'This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: you shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

Lord, have mercy on us, and write your law in our hearts by your Holy Spirit

Prayer of the Day

Everliving God, before the earth was formed, and even after it shall cease to be, you are God. Break into our short span of life and show us those things that are eternal, that we may serve your purpose in all we do; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

The Ministry of the Word

Judges 4:1-10

¹ Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, now that Ehud was dead. ² So the Lord sold them into the hands of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. Sisera, the commander of his army, was based in Harosheth

Haggoyim. ³ Because he had nine hundred chariots fitted with iron and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the Lord for help.

⁴ Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. ⁵ She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided. ⁶ She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. ⁷ I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.'"

⁸ Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go."

⁹ "Certainly I will go with you," said Deborah. "But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. ¹⁰ There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

Psalm 123

1 To you, I lift up my eyes: you who are enthroned in the heavens.

**2 As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master:
or as the eyes of a maid toward the hand of her mistress,**

3 So our eyes look to the Lord our God, until he show us his mercy.

4 Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us, for we have had our fill of derision.

5 Our souls overflow with mockery of those at ease: and with the contempt of the proud.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

¹ Now, brothers and sisters, 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 and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵ You are all children of the light and children 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 awake and sober. 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 sober, 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.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

Matthew 25:14-30

Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ

¹⁴ "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹ "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.'

²¹ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

²² "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.'

²³ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

²⁴ "Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

²⁶ “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

²⁸ ““So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

This is the gospel of the Lord: **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

Sermon 1 Thessalonians 4-5

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

Prayers

Let us pray for the world and the church.

Response: Loving God, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

The Lord's Prayer

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray,

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Exhortation

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we who would come to the holy communion of the body and blood of our Saviour Christ must consider how St Paul exhorts us to examine ourselves before presuming to eat of that bread and drink of that cup.

For the benefit is great, if with a penitent heart and lively faith we receive that holy sacrament. We then spiritually eat the flesh of Christ and drink his blood; we dwell in Christ and he in us; we are one with Christ and Christ with us.

Yet also the danger is great if we receive the bread and cup unworthily. Judge yourselves therefore, that you be not judged of the Lord. Repent truly of your sins, having a steadfast faith in Christ our Saviour. Amend your lives and love your neighbour.

Above all, give hearty thanks to God for the redemption of the world by the death and passion of our Saviour Christ, truly God and truly human, who humbled himself to death on the cross for us sinners, that he might make us children of God, and raise us to eternal life.

You who truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God and walking in his holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this

holy sacrament to strengthen and comfort you. But first, let us make a humble confession of our sins to almighty God.

Confession

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, judge of all people, we acknowledge with shame the sins we have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against your divine majesty, provoking most justly your wrath and indignation against us.

We earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for all our misdoings. Have mercy on us, most merciful Father. For your Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake forgive us all that is past, and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please you in newness of life, to the honour and glory of your name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God our heavenly Father, who of his great mercy has promised forgiveness of sins to all who with hearty repentance and true faith turn to him: have mercy on you; pardon and deliver you from all your sins; confirm and strengthen you in all goodness; and keep you in eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hear the words of assurance for those who truly turn to Christ:

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. I Tim 1:15

Hymn 599 (tune ii) - Take my life and let it be

**Take my life, and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee.**

**Take my moments and my days,
let them flow in ceaseless praise.**

**Take my hands, and let them move
at the impulse of thy love.**

**Take my feet, and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee.**

**Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my King.**

**Take my lips, and let them be
filled with messages from thee.**

**Take my silver and my gold,
nothing, Lord, would I withhold.**

**Take my intellect, and use
every power as thou shalt choose.**

**Take my will and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine.**

**Take my heart, it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne.**

**Take my love: my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure-store.**

**Take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee.**

Offering

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have these gifts to share. Accept and use our offerings for your glory and for the service of your kingdom.

Blessed be God forever.

The Thanksgiving

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

It is indeed right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to you, Lord, Might Creator and Eternal God.

Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying:

**Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Glory to you, O Lord most high.**

Prayer of Approach

We do not presume to come to your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are the same Lord

whose nature is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.

All glory to you, our heavenly Father, for in your tender mercy you gave your only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death on the cross for our redemption: who made there, by his one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; and instituted, and in his holy gospel commanded us to continue, a perpetual memory of his precious death until his coming again.

Hear us, merciful Father, we humbly pray, and grant that we who receive these gifts of your creation, this bread and this wine, according to your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed body and blood; who on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given you thanks, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.' Likewise after supper he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them saying, 'Drink from this, all of you; for this is my blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' Amen.

We who are many are one body, **for we all share in the one bread.**
The gifts of God for the people of God.

Come let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in remembrance that he died for us, and feed on him in our hearts with thanksgiving.

The Lord's Supper is open to all who love the Lord.

After Communion

Almighty and everliving God, we heartily thank you that you graciously feed us, who have duly received these holy mysteries, with the spiritual food of the most precious body and blood of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, and thus assure us of your favour and goodness towards us and that we are true members of the mystical body of your Son, the blessed company of all faithful people, and are also heirs, through hope, of your eternal kingdom, by the merits of the most precious death and passion of your dear Son. And we humbly beseech you, heavenly Father, so to assist us with your grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as you have prepared for us to walk in, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be all honour and glory, world without end.

Hymn Soldiers of Christ Arise

Verse 1

**Soldiers of Christ arise And put your armour on
Strong in the strength which God supplies
Through His eternal Son**

Strong in the Lord of hosts And in His mighty power

Who in the strength of Jesus trusts
Is more than conqueror.

Verse 2

Stand then in His great might With all His strength endued
And take to arm you for the fight
The panoply of God;

That having all things done And all your conflicts past
Ye may o'ercome through Christ alone
And stand entire at last.

Verse 3

Stand then against your foes, in close and firm array;
legions of wily fiends oppose
throughout the evil day:

but meet the sons of night, and mock their vain design
armed in the arms of heavenly light,
of righteousness divine.

Verse 4

Leave no unguarded place, No weakness of the soul;
Take every virtue, every grace,
And fortify the whole:

in him forever joined, to battle all proceed;
but arm yourselves with all the mind
that was in Christ, your Head.

Notices

Dismissal

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord: **In the name of Christ. Amen.**

Sermon Introduction

The last sermon I preached here, was from the first half of 1 Thessalonians 4 and was about living in preparation of Paul's visit and Christ's return. Obviously we have missed out on a visit by Paul. Nevertheless, the passage is very relevant to us today as we live in expectant hope of Jesus's return.

Most Christians have some understanding that Jesus will return in the last days with some kind of a great judgement. It seems that there are two predominating views of these events. Many Christians have next to no interest in the end times, usually expecting that Jesus will return eventually and something momentous will probably happen, but don't expect it to happen in their earthly lifetimes, and consequently have very little interest in it. Other Christians seem almost completely focussed on them, poring through the scriptures (particularly the book of Revelation) and seeking out the latest last days preachers to gain some insight.

In today's passage Paul says he doesn't want us to be uninformed about these things, so he thinks that they are important. He gives 4 reasons that these things are important - he says they are important because they give Hope, they give encouragement, they help us be prepared, and they help us to build it each other up.

So let's start by looking at hope.

Pauls says he does not want you to be uninformed about **those who sleep in death**, so that you do not grieve like the **rest of mankind, who have no hope**.

Obviously since Paul's first visit, some members of the young church at Thessalonica had died. There is no suggestion that there was anything unusual about this, any specific martyrdom violent persecution. Disease, accidents and old age have always been part of life, and were even closer enemies back then without our modern hospitals and nursing homes that tend to extend our lives, and then hide the unpleasantness of death from our eyes.

The problem for the Thessalonians was not that their newly Christians friends had died, but that they didn't understand the end times. They expected Jesus to return in glory, and as Paul reminds them, *the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God.*

Their concern was that they expected to be alive when this happened, and were afraid that their parents and friends who had died would miss out on the eternal life that Jesus would bring at his return. This is perhaps not surprising as Christian language is often confusing regarding eternal life and Jesus's defeat of death. Just as one example, Jesus says in John 8:51 "Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death." You can see how easy it is to get confused, and how the Thessalonians could either worry that the entire gospel was a mistake, or that their friends who had died had missed out on the eternal life that Jesus promised, had missed out on the hope of eternal life that Jesus and Paul had spoken about so much.

Paul reminds them (and us) that there is hope for those who have died, and for all of us. Jesus has defeated death, and a time will come when no one will ever even taste death, but that time has not come yet, and we live in hope, the absolutely certain hope, that that day will come. However, we in this age also have the equally certain hope of a resurrection like Jesus's. And just to make it absolutely clear, Paul explains exactly how it will happen: when Jesus returns, *God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's word, all who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.* Paul is obviously using the euphemism 'fallen asleep' instead of dying, but otherwise the hope is absolutely certain, when Jesus returns, the Christians who have 'fallen asleep in him', that is, died, will be raised back to life, and then will be joined by all the Christians who are still alive. So, in a sense, there are two paths to eternal life with God - death in this age followed by resurrection, or eternal continuation of this life when Christ returns. In either case, the Christian has absolute hope in eternal life.

Paul goes on to say that this not only brings hope, but encouragement as well.

It is certainly an encouragement to found 'in Christ' either at our temporary death in this age, or when Christ returns. The hope of being with the Lord forever only applies to those 'in him' so the hope we have must also be an encouragement to make our salvation sure, to make sure our faith is entirely in God's unfailing grace and not our own unreliable efforts.

This hope also leaves no room for reliance on a 'deathbed conversion.' While I am sure they can happen, two things concern me about them. Pretty every example I have heard of recently, including reported conversions of Stephen Hawking and Charles Darwin (who is claimed to have recanted his theory of evolution on his deathbed) have subsequently been refuted by family who were actually at the deathbed. More significantly, none of us have any certainty of the nature of how we will die, and whether we will even make it to a bed to die on, or perhaps die suddenly without warning.

No, the encouragement of eternal life is to make sure you are ready now, and to stay ready. Paul describes this as being awake and sober.

Paul encourages us to *put on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.* The image here is putting on armour, specifically a breastplate and helmet, to protect us from anything that might snatch us away from being in Christ. This reminds me of Ephesians 6:10 following, which says:

⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but

against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ *Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.* ¹⁴ *Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,* ¹⁵ *and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.* ¹⁶ *In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.* ¹⁷ *Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

Note that this armour is designed to protect you from the enemy, the Devil, and allow us to stand firm, that is, to resist falling away before we attain the eternal life that Jesus promises.

Finally, it is not just focussed on you. We who have the hope and encouragement of eternal life are to encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact the Thessalonians were doing.

While eternity in heaven with the Trinity would be wonderful regardless of who else is there, the love I have for you, my Christian sisters and brothers, as well as the members of my family and so many other people I know and love in this life (and some I've never met) leads me to want them to share in eternal life as well. Paul obviously has the same view, as he encourages the Thessalonians to not only make their own salvation sure, but to encourage and build up the other members of their church, so they also keep the hope of eternal life.

Pauls actually says that they are already doing a great job of it, as I am sure you are as well! I am sure you are already sharing the things that encourage you and give you hope, the knowledge of the certainty of eternal life, both for those who fall asleep and for those who remain when Christ returns; the encouragement to protect your faith with the breastplate of faith and love, and the helmet of the hope of salvation, and in fact the whole armour of God we read about Ephesians *the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and also prayer in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.* As these things build you up in hope and encouragement, and prepare you for Christ's return, so we use them to build up our sisters and brothers in that same hope of eternal life.

So these are the hope and encouragement that prepare us and build us up for the sure and certain hope of eternal life with Christ. Let us use them to make our salvation sure, and strengthen the certainly of eternal life in our sisters and brothers around us, that together, whether awake or asleep when Christ returns, we may live together in him.

Amen