

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

DATE

July 17, 2022

SPEAKER

Sam Nelson

SERIES

People Of The Kingdom

PART

9

TITLE

Alert At All Times

SCRIPTURE

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11



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Well, good morning Providence. It is so good to be with you here this morning. My name is Sam and I'm the pastor of young adult discipleship here at Providence. And if you're wondering what that means, that's any individual age, 23 or 35, I have the joy of helping become disciple making disciples of Christ. And so it's a joy to be with you this morning. And let me just say and begin by saying, I am so grateful for you and your investment in myself and in many others in being able to grow in Christ and to grow as a pastor, it's because of your commitment. And I mean that truly. And so all of us here are individuals who have played a huge part in the lives of the pastors of Providence. And we are so grateful for you. Like Dave O mentioned early on in this series, when we read about the Thessalonians and their faith, we think of you.

And we don't say that flippantly. We mean that. We think about Providence. We think about the Providence family, and we are so grateful for that. We're continuing in our series this morning in the book of 1 Thessalonians. So if you have a Bible, you can go and grab one of those and turn to 1 Thessalonians. That should be in the back of your Bible. If you're new and you don't have a Bible, maybe you are still new to Christianity, there is a Bible in the seat back in front of you. Feel free to use that this morning and take it home with you. And if you are online joining us, we just want to say welcome to you as well. Go ahead and go into that Google search bar type in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, because that's where we're going to be this morning. And it's continuing this series called People of the Kingdom.

People of the Kingdom live in a really distinct, specific, special way. And so throughout this whole series we've been looking at what does it mean to be People of the Kingdom? And one of the prominent themes in being a people or a person of the kingdom is that we are looking forward to the return of the king, looking forward to the return of Christ who has established this kingdom. And so that is what we are doing today, looking at what it means to be a person of the kingdom in first 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. So Paul wrote two letters. He wrote one 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians we're in the first one. The big number five is the chapter. And then the little number is the verse. We'll be in verses 1 through 11 this morning. So with that being said, let's bow our heads and ask God's help, as we read his word.

God, in heaven, we are so grateful that you created us to know you, and that you have pursued us when we rebelled against you, and that you sent your son to rescue us and to bring us into your kingdom. Thank you that you have spoken to us not only in creation, but also in your word and that we get to spend time in it this morning. I pray that you would quiet our hearts, that we'd be still and know that you are God, and that you will be exalted among the nations. I pray that you would be pleased now, as we read, give us understanding. Would you help me in my weakness? God, we long to see you. And I am powerless at accomplishing that. We long to abide in Christ, and I have very little to do to that end. And so we ask for you through your spirit and your word to do exactly what you love to and long to do among people, which is reveal yourself. And so with that being said, God, we pray all this in your name. Amen.

All right. Hopefully you're in 1 Thessalonians. I've got a picture of some daisies here on the screen. And if you were a kid, maybe you did that playful rhyme where you picked up a daisy from the field and you started mu-

tilating it and you went, “He loves me, he loves me not, he loves me. Maybe she loves me, she loves me not.” You went. And then all you had at the end was this little stump and you were left with, she loves me not. And you thought, well, let’s get a new daisy. And so you picked up another one. He loves me, loves me not. And you just kept going until maybe you found one with a right amount of pedals. With a heap of mutilated daisies at your side, you thought she loves me. And a lot of the times we can have that same kind of uncertainty about our relationship with God. Right? We can sometimes think, “Well, I hope he cares, maybe, maybe not. I know there’s something there, but, he loves me, he me you not. I’m safe, maybe I’m not safe.

And if we’re honest in this room, we’ve probably felt glimpses of what that feels like in life. We’ve probably experienced little touches of maybe a spiritual insecurity where we are just quite not sure. Does God truly love me? I’ve been a Christian my whole life, but does he really like me? Does he really accept me? If you’re here in this room or online, let me just acknowledge that is an unfortunately normal part of the Christian life. We experience that. And it wasn’t foreign to Thessalonians either, the Thessalonians in this book of 1 Thessalonians, they experienced this. These were real people that experienced real doubt and real insecurity when it came to Christ.

And so they knew much about the second coming of Christ, when Christ would return. But instead of being confident and expecting it, they thought about it with worry. There was a slight hesitation. Well maybe if he comes, I won’t make the cut. Maybe when he returns, I will have done a certain sin that he’s not proud of, and I won’t really be in heaven with him. And so if you can identify with feeling that certain uncertainty, I’ve got really great news for you, because this text this morning will tell us one singular truth that I believe if you really believe it, and take it deep into your soul will help weed out that uncertainty and fear in your own soul. And that singular truth is this. Since believers are safe in Christ, we ought to await his return with alertness, self-control and hope.

So if you’re taking notes or you’ve got a pencil with you or a pen, and you just want to wrap up what 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 says, this is it. Since believers are safe in Christ, we ought to await his return with alertness, self-control and hope. So without further ado, let’s read the text together. So Paul writes, “Now concerning the times and the seasons brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying there is peace and security, then sudden destruction will come upon them. As labor pains come upon a pregnant woman and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness brothers for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.”

And so the first way that we ought to expect Christ’s return is to expect Christ sudden return with confidence. That’s what these first few verses are communicating to us. Expect Christ’s sudden return with confidence. See popular culture, spiritualized movies, and dramatic Christian fiction have unfortunately left us thinking about the return of Christ like a haunted house, riddled with trap doors, just waiting for us to fall through, as if the wrong misstep will trigger a terrible trap. And so consequently, when many of us think about the end

times or Jesus' second coming, we experienced feelings of fear, anxiety, or worry.

The Thessalonians were experiencing similar feelings. Many of us are unsure, like them, if God would accept us at Jesus' second coming. You see, they knew that Jesus' return would be filled with righteous wrath. And so they worry that they might be recipients of God's judgment. You see Jesus came in the beginning to bring peace and to invite into the kingdom. But when he comes again, it will be to enact justice and they knew that. And so I wonder, how many of us here in this room are slightly, maybe just a little bit, worried like them, that God will accept us in that day?

Paul comforts Thessalonians though, and us, by calling us to expect Christ's sudden return with confidence. You see Christ's second return is talked a lot about in the Old Testament. Paul refers to it as the day of the Lord, but that term isn't original to him. The day of the Lord is a term that many of the prophets used all throughout the Old Testament to refer to this future coming day, when God's vengeance would be displayed, when justice would be finally, concretely among the earth. And so I want to share with you a few verses that display what that day of the Lord will look like. Isaiah 2:12 says this, "For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up, and it shall be brought low. Secondly, Joel 1:15, "Alas for the day. For the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the almighty it comes."

And then lastly, as if those weren't frightening enough, Joel, 2:30-32, "And I will show wonders," so Yahweh, "I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, there shall be among those who escape as the Lord has said. And among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls." Make no mistake, Jesus' return will be sudden, and it will be inevitable. That is why Paul uses two relatable metaphors to communicate to us just how sudden and how inevitable it is.

First, he says in verse two, that it will be like a thief in the night. That's what he says, a thief in the night. You might be wondering, well, what does he mean by that? Well, it's quite obvious. He's saying that just like someone breaking and entering into your home would be sudden, the return of Christ will be sudden and unexpected. A robber doesn't send you a message and say, "Hey, I'm going to be there at 3:30 AM. Make sure the doors are unlocked." Right? And so in the same way, Jesus' return is going to be sudden and surprising. It's a metaphor original to Jesus in Luke 12:39. He's saying that the return will be sudden and unexpected. Therefore, it's reasonable to expect that his return will take place at the most unlikely time. That's why Paul says, they'll be saying peace and security. It'll be in a time where it's the last thing someone would think would happen, but not only will it be sudden, but it will be inevitable.

Just like the birth of triplets for a mother 39 weeks pregnant, the return of Christ is inevitable. There is no stopping it. There is no stopping Christ. Jesus will return at an appointed time, but only those in darkness should tremble at this thought. I mean, look at the end of verse three, it says that, "and they will not escape."

And so there should be a certain level of hesitation, of fear, and perhaps concern reading this, “and they will not escape.” It makes you wonder, “Well, who’s not going to escape. Is it us? Is it other people? How do I know what kind of people won’t escape?” So who is they? Because whoever they are, they are in grave danger. But Paul’s following words, shed light on those who will not escape. He says in verse four, “But you are not in darkness, brothers.” You, so believers, as we’re reading this, “you are not in darkness brothers,” for that day to surprise you like a thief, for that day to be a danger to you, for that day to be a day where you won’t escape. And so logically he’s saying that believers are safe, but unbelievers, those who look at Christ and don’t see any beauty, who look at Christ and feel apathy, who look at Christ and say, “Yeah, maybe one day,” those are the people that ought to fear the day of the Lord. But not believers. Those are the people that will not escape. Believers do not need to fear God’s wrath in this way. Believers shouldn’t fear God’s wrath tomorrow, nor should they fear God’s wrath today. Why? Because Paul says believers are, “children of light.” In verse five he calls them “children of light.”

To communicate this, you ought to think about a principal’s office. If you remember what it was like to be in grade school, middle school, high school, I don’t know what kind of student you were, whether you were the one that made sure everything was right. Your grades were always good, A pluses all round. Or maybe you just kind of took it easy in grade school. The principal and the principal’s office were a symbol of fear and hesitation. Right?

I mean, you can imagine what it’s like to be sitting in the cafeteria, having fun, eating your lunch, your PB and J, and then suddenly that door opens in the corner and in walks a principal. And he or she is walking, and suddenly you can see just the sea of students, people start straighten up. Right? Heads go down. You don’t want to make eye contact, because if you make eye contact with a shark, the shark’s going to get you. And so you just kind of, you keep still don’t make a move, kind of like Jurassic Park with a T-Rex. If you don’t move it, won’t see you. So you just kind of keep calm.

There’s this certain level of fear, because you’re expecting this person, the principal, to dole out discipline left and right. It’s natural to feel that way about a principal. But imagine with me for a moment that principal is your mom or dad, and that in the cafeteria, you’re having fun, you’re eating your lunch, and then the principal walks in, and everyone else starts to straighten up, but you relax because you think, that’s that’s mom, that’s dad. Now I know all of us didn’t have great loving moms and dads, but imagine for a moment that principal who is your mom or dad is loving and kind and generous and is safe. I mean, how would you feel in that moment? You probably feel a sense of confidence. Right? You probably wouldn’t feel the same amount of fear. And it’s the same way with believers. When we think about the day of the Lord, we’re thinking about a day when God is coming back for his children, his children of light, the text says.

And so we ought not to fear that day with hesitancy and worry. We ought to look forward to it, because that day is when we get to be reunited with our father. But unfortunately it is normal for believers to doubt their eternal security before God. I mean, can anybody identify with that feeling? Has anyone ever had that

thought? Am I maybe, am I saved really? Do I need to raise my hand at this prayer? Like, do I just need to do it right now? Because I'm a little unsure. Unfortunately, it's normal. I mean, many of us have asked, "Does God truly accept me? Does God really want me?" I know many of us in this room are believers, that we've put our faith in Christ, but it's still common to wonder if we're secure. This feeling is unfortunately and unnaturally normal. It's part of living in a broken world, but God is so kind though. And he knows that we experience these fears. And so he writes to us and these verses right here.

So these Thessalonian believers know well about Christ's impending return, but they're worried that they might not make the cut. There is hesitation that they've done enough or have adequately maintained their position with God. And so Paul identifies this fear and he corrects it by pointing them to the logic of those who are in Christ. He calls them children of light. That's what it says in the text, whether you're reading on the screen and you're looking at a Bible, he calls them children of light and that identity applies to us as well. You see, 2 Thessalonians 1:9 later, Paul's sequel to this book, talks about the final judgment of Christ. And he says that it will usher in separation from the presence of God. The fate of every unbeliever at the return of Christ will be sealed, permanent separation from God. But this is a reality that believers need not fear. If you are in Christ. If you know him, if you've trusted in him, if you've looked at him and said, "Yes, I want to follow you, I believe in you," there is no risk that God would possibly reverse what he has already done for you on the cross. Therefore, you can and should confidently await and expect the return of Christ.

And so according to these verses, believers are safe from the wrath of God in Christ. As God's children, we can safely await Christ's return. But how do we respond to this truth? Well, I believe there's one main way that we respond to this truth, and that is this. Let's rest in our identity as God's children. Let's rest in our identity as God's children. Verse five is a declaration over every person that has looked at the person of Christ and faith. If you've trusted in Jesus, you are a child of God.

I know that many of us in this room mentally agree and assent to this truth, but our behavior, if we're honest, indicates a certain level of skepticism. I mean, how many of us live in fear of God's judgment when we sin? I do at times. How many of us live our day with the subtle belief that we must maintain favor before God, as if our rightness before God is like a balloon in the air that you just kind of have to keep just pumping up? Just good work here, right thought here, make sure I do this here, go to church here. I missed something. Oh, the balloon is dropping, dropping. Let me make sure I get it. I mean, how many of this feel a certain level of worry that way? How many of us look at other Christians and believe that they must be more of a child of God than we are? Each of these questions drive at the way we actually don't believe that we are children of God. We might intellectually believe this truth, but functionally, our behavior indicates something very different. So join me, join me in resting in our identity as God's children. Since we're God's children, we can confidently await Christ's sudden return as believers. We're safe in Christ. But Paul moves next to call the Thessalonians and us to live in accordance with our identity. In verses one through five. Paul explains that we're safe in Christ. And then in verses 6 through 10, he calls us to live in light of that safety. This is how the gospel works, in case you didn't know. God always communicates to us identity first and then response. He communicates

to us, this is who you are. And this is how you ought to live in response. False religion does the opposite though. It says, do this. And then this is who you are. If you check these things off, maintain this certain record, then you can rest secure that you are this person, but the gospel is so much better in that it gives us the identity first and then calls us to live in light of it.

So let's read verse six. "So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night. And those who get drunk are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober. Having put on the breast plate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we might live with him."

And so the second way that we ought to await Christ's return is with alertness, self-control and hope. Await Christ's return with alertness, self-control and hope. The conclusion of verses six through eight hinges on the logic of our identity in verse five. Don't miss it. "Since we are God's children," namely children of light he says, if you're looking at the text, "we ought to live. As if we really are children of God." See verses 6 through 10. These latter verses explains what it means to live in light of this identity. And so, since we are children of light, children of Christ, right with him, if we've put our faith in him, then let's await his return with alertness, self-control and hope. These three words, describe how we ought to wait as believers for Christ's return. So let's look at each of these three words closely.

Firstly, we safely await Christ's return by being alert. Look at verse six, he says, Paul says, "So then," see, this is a very powerful connecting word in the original language. He's essentially saying there is no logical conclusion other than what I'm about to say, if you are a child of light, if you are a child of God, if you are a believer, then this is the only way you can live. So then therefore this is the only way you can live. And that is to, "not sleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober."

Now see, Paul is not referring to literal awakesness. When he says to not sleep. He's not saying that believers should stay awake all night and drink a bunch of caffeine and coffee and Red Bull and just stay awake until Christ's return. You probably won't make it. Instead, he's saying there is a moral, spiritual, ethical awakesness that ought to grip us as believers. Since we're God's children, we ought to act like God's children. A life lived not being alert about our present world, and our eternal home in heaven that awaits us, that is the life that Paul is calling us to. Hebrews 11:13 says that we are strangers and exiles on this earth. And so a spiritual sleepiness is to live as if that is not true.

To be alert as a child of God is to live fully aware that this world, that the 9:00 to 5:00, the day in day out, the busyness, the chores, the unending house projects to do, the planning that this is not normal. It's not our home. It's to live in a way instead, where God's mission is your life mission, where God's word characterizes your life, where God's people are your people. It's so easy to just slip into comfort in this world, especially in a city like Raleigh.

And the Thessalonians would've experienced something very similar. They were situated between a busy harbor that brought in a lot of commercial activity, and one of the main highways. You can imagine 95 running right up next to Thessalonica. And so, as you can imagine, they are flush with cash. There is tons to do and see and experience in Thessalonica. And so they were certainly tempted to materialism, wealth and physical safety. And all of these, Paul's warning might lead to a spiritual sleep. See believers are undoubtedly safe in Christ, but we should wait for Christ by staying awake and alert. But secondly, we ought to safely await Christ's return by being self controlled. This is what Paul means. When he says be sober in versus six through eight, he says, be sober. And then he says it again right here in verse eight, "let us be sober." So he's, he's calling us to some kind of sobriety.

And so when you read that and you're reading your Bible, you have to ask yourself, "Well, what does he mean by that?" Well, he could mean maybe don't drink alcohol. Some believers in the past have said, "Well, here you go folks. This is it don't drink a lick of alcohol." I don't think that's quite exactly what Paul is saying. He's referring to a type of self control that is reflected in the word sober. See the original word for sober here. You might as well be translated as self controlled. And if we think about someone who is sober, isn't that what it means to be sober? It's someone who is completely aware of their faculties. They're they are completely in control of who they are. They're not led away by any kind of drink or intoxication. Someone who is drunk has no control over what they say or do, right? But someone who is sober is fully in control. Their will is the king. Their will is on the throne of their person.

Someone who is not sober their will is just kind of left to the whimsical desires of whatever enters their thought or enters their heart in that moment. Paul is calling us to live soberly. This is how believers ought to live. See a self-controlled person is not enslaved to their passions or cravings. Their wants are subject to their will, not the other way around. What does this mean for us as God's children though? It means that our lives, for us in this room, our lives should be marked by self-control. You see those in darkness are enslaved to their desires, but believers have been freed to be slaves of righteousness. According to Romans 6. While we may still struggle with sin, and believers, we do struggle with sin do we, can struggle with sin, not being mastered by it. That's how we await Christ's return.

And so if you're in this room and you feel like a sinful anxiety is mastering you, let me call you to run to Christ and ask him, "Please Christ help me to stay awake, self control to not be mastered by this." If you struggle with pornography in this room and you feel mastered by that sin as a believer, let me call you to run to Christ, who offers you freedom so that you can live that self-controlled life, and not give in to that lust. But lastly, as God's children, we are to be marked by hope. See Paul lists, faith love and hope in verses eight, as pieces of spiritual armor that believers had put on when they had put their trust in Christ. That's what he says that we, "let us be sober, having put on," so something happened in the past, "having put on the breast plate of faith and love and for a helmet, the hope of salvation." And that is the last way that we await Christ's return, hope.

See, many of us are familiar with the word hope, but our idea of the word hope is like this picture of fingers crossed. We just kind of think, we might talk about hope. We might say, "I hope we go to lunch tomorrow, or I hope we get to do this." If you're a kid in the room, you might be thinking, "Summer is almost over. I hope we get to go to Disney World." Right? Or if you are a high school, senior or college senior, you might be thinking about this next year and thinking, "I hope I graduate. I don't know. It might not happen, but I hope it happens."

You might be nearing retirement in this room right now. And you might be thinking, "I hope I have enough money saved up. I'm not sure." And so we kind of cross our fingers and we use this word hope as this kind of wishful thinking. But the Bible uses the word hope much differently. The Bible uses the word hope to describe a certain sure future. God is not wishing the best for us. He's saying there is a guaranteed future for you if you're in Christ. And what is that guaranteed future for believers? The salvation that was brought for them by the precious blood of Christ. Believers need not worry about the day of the Lord because they are safe in Christ. That is the entirety of verses 9 through 11. Believers can safely await the return of Christ in hope, because Christ died in their place.

Believers need not fear the return of Christ, because according to verse nine, he says that Christ died for us. God's wrath has already been poured out on those who are in Christ and not us. The rage displayed on the day of the Lord will not fall on believers. No drop of God's judgment on that day will fall on any head. Why? God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation. This is why we can be sure of it. Who died for us? The wrath experienced in that day will not touch us, because we are in Christ who has atoned for every sin, of every person that has looked at Christ and believed in him. Our hope of salvation in the future, that hope that we cling to, as we await his return is built up in the work of Christ.

That is our hope in life and in death. And so whether we are awake or asleep, we're headed for eternal life with Christ. And so what does that mean? He's saying is that whether we live or we die, we will experience safety with God. He's saying that whether we are awake or asleep, so from birth to grave and anything in between, you can be assured that all of the life that you experience, there is a hope rooted in the death and resurrection of Christ, whatever you may be experiencing today, whether you're here with us or online. Maybe you're online because you've just been suffering for months and for weeks, and you're just not sure if there's enough hope anymore. Let me assure you that whether you are awake or asleep in Christ, you can be confident about tomorrow. And if you're in this room and it was hard to get here this morning, you can be assured that if you are in Christ, whether you're awake or asleep, whatever suffering or tribulation you might be experiencing, we are safe in Christ.

You can look cancer in the eye and say, you may take my physical life on this earth, but I am destined to be with my father in heaven. You can experience the brokenness of divorce and proclaim Christ died for me. One day, I will live with him. You can struggle through joblessness and sleep easy at night, knowing Christ died for you, guaranteeing you a future with him. Because Christ lived a perfect life, suffered and experi-

enced the judgment we deserve for sin, we have hope for the future. Our hope is that we will be with God forever. So Christ's return should not cause us to fear. It should cause us to long for it daily with alertness, self-control and hope. See, we keep awake because we long for Christ out of a love for him. And this picture is a small picture of what that kind of awakesness looks like.

Months, or maybe a year ago, I had saved up enough money for a type of dream guitar that I was really excited to get. And so I had finally made the purchase. And then a few days later, I got the tracking information, quickly saved it to my phone, and waited for that beautiful brown truck to arrive one day at my house, revealing what I had been longing for. And so when I finally received that tracking number and the day finally came, when I could see that it said out on truck for delivery, I rejoiced. And I lived that day in a really peculiar, certain way, like many of you have. Right? You're peeking out the window. You're just kind of looking if, "Is it here yet? Not yet. Okay. I'll go back to doing what I was doing." And then you kind of go back to it. "It's been about two minutes. I better go check again." And so you take a look. You're like, "Ah, it's not there." And then you get distracted. You start doing chores and, "Oh shoot I forgot." It's been an hour. You look out, "Did I miss it? I got to sign for it. I don't want to have to go to UPS and pick it up from them. I want them to deliver it to me." And so you're living your whole day with this thing like, "It's coming. I need to stay alert and awake and aware of this day when it's coming." And it's not hard to miss what I'm getting at here. We get to await this beautiful treasure of Christ with joy in our heart and alertness, because we long for his return. So we can confidently await his return with awakesness, alertness, self-control and hope. There is no time to waste.

And so if you are in Christ, you ought to make his mission, your mission, his love, your love. His character will become your character. We must not spiritually check out. Instead, we ought to await with alertness, self-control and hope we ought to live in holiness, making Christ's mission our mission. There is no time to waste in spiritually coasting, like the high school senior, who knows that they're going to graduate, and so they stop turning assignments in. There is no time to waste like the employee nearing retirement, who says, "I'm already going to retire. I'm going to get what I need to get. I might as well stop meeting deadlines and going to meetings." No.

Instead, the life of a believer who is safe in Christ is spent making disciples. We cannot check out while there are still disciples to be made, local churches to be revitalized and pastors to be trained. We cannot check out while there is still holiness to pursue, virtue to embody and love for our neighbor to be shown. We cannot check out while there are still nations with no Bible in their language, while there are people dying with no access to the gospel, while there are still poor and hungry. We cannot check out while there is a next generation longing to hear of the Christ that we love. We cannot and must not spiritually check out. Instead, we should safely await Christ's return while pursuing alertness, self-control and hope.

And so how should we respond to these verses here? Well, first let's reach Our Four, Raleigh and the world. Christ's impending return ought to create a razor sharp sobriety in our spirits. If Christ's return means judg-

ment for all unbelievers, and if we are safe in Christ, then we must reach as many as we can with the hope that they will join us in safely awaiting Christ's return.

Secondly, let's pursue holiness. Paul uses the idea of sleep to communicate that it is possible to take your foot off the spiritual gas pedal and let the health of your soul diminish. Do you feed the cravings of your flesh? Are you led by your wants? Are you letting the world's lullaby of comfort and materialism soothe you into soul sleep? Wake up. Christ is returning. We must be alert as we await him. And in my time preparing for this, my heart and soul was convicted as well as I was aware of way after way that I had let maybe this spiritual lullaby just kind of sooth me into a soul sleep. And when that happens in my life, there are a few questions that I'll ask to try and uncover what's going on in my soul. And I want to share just a few of those questions with you. So some of these questions that I ask are meant to expose what is going on in my soul in a way that might awaken you as well.

And so first, what controls my emotions? What do I fall asleep thinking about? What do I think about when I wake up? When was the last time I was angry, and was it connected to my selfishness? What do the people around me say that I love? That's a scary one. Where do I spend my money? Do my thoughts and dreams have more in common with the Bible or with the world? Providence family, let's pursue holiness in light of Christ's return. We're safe and secure as God's children, but our safety ought to propel us into holiness. And so if you're here and you hear those kind of applications about holiness and reaching people, chances are, if you're like me, you've probably felt a pretty strong twinge of guilt in your heart. Like, "Just let me try harder. Let me just work harder. I'm just, I'm still not doing enough." And let me encourage you. The answer, the fuel for this obedience is not in you trying harder, it's engaging at the gospel in verses 9 and 10, that Christ died in your place.

So if you're sitting here right now and you feel your life has been marked by sleepiness, a lack of self control and hopelessness, let me urge you to not wallow in despair, but to turn your eyes to Christ. Gaze at verses 9 through 10. Let this picture of God create such a love for you, that alertness, self-control and hope are the fruits. Look at Jesus. Marvel at the God who has destined you for life with him. Worship Christ for tasting death in your place. Memorize verses 9 and 10. Think about the fact that God has not destined you for wrath. Dive deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper into the gospel, to see these things take root in your life. The answer is not trying harder. The answer is seeing and savoring Christ in the gospel more. This is the work of a Christian. It is to turn to the gospel daily for holiness, for love, for peace, for self control. And it is the work of what we do as a body of Christ as Providence. We're called to minister to share, to feed one another, the gospel. And that is exactly where Paul goes next. So to conclude in verse 11, he says this, "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you were doing."

And so lastly, we ought to await Christ's return by reminding one another of the hope we have in the gospel. Remind one another of the hope we have in the gospel. Christian community is built on, sustained by, and

buoyed by marveling at Jesus' return and savoring the gospel message. Paul commands us to encourage one another and build one another up. He says, "encourage and build one another up." If you're a Christian in this room, that means that you've committed your life to obeying Christ. These are commands. I invite you to obey them. That we are called to encourage one another and build one another up. A healthy church is one where each member is reminding one another of Christ's work in their place. This is why we sing songs about Jesus' death and resurrection. This is why we listen to sermons about Jesus' death and resurrection. It's not as if we need to rehearse these things over and over again, as if we've forgotten them. It's because we need them to live, and to grow in this Christian life. Are you discouraged this morning? Do you feel torn down? Do you feel spiritually sick?

Was it difficult to get out of bed? Has it been a trying last maybe month, year or decade? Do you feel alone walking into this church? You need to hear about Christ in your place, and you're not hearing it as if to become saved again. You're hearing it because it reminds your heart and soul what is true. I mean like a marathon runner that reminds the other marathon runners of the end that is coming, we do that as believers, by reminding one another of Christ who suffered and died in our place.

Now I know that some of you may be feeling and thinking, "Well, Sam, that's easy for you. You're a pastor. You're well connected. You must know a lot of people here. You have a lot of people to talk to and remind you about the gospel, remind you about Christ. It must be really easy for you, but you don't know my situation. I'm alone. I don't have anyone. No one knows my name. Let alone knows my season of life so that they might remind me of Christ." And if that is you today, let me first say that I [inaudible 00:39:54] that is your experience. I'm sorry that you felt that way, and that you feel that way today.

I've experienced that same kind of church experience myself. And I know it can be very taxing and burdensome, but if that is you, let me encourage you, challenge you to step out and explore one of the best ways to be known at Providence. And that is through a life group. And that's one of the first ways that we ought to respond to this. Let's all move toward becoming active members of a life group. Providence can feel like a large place and life groups are where a large church can feel small. So let's become active members of a life group. For some of us that just might mean committing to a group. You've been kind of sprinkling around which one to go to, stick with one and dive in. Maybe you're in a life group and you've been in it for a long time, but you've had one foot in and one foot out, kind of not sure if you're really in. Let me encourage you to put both feet in and commit to that group of people. Maybe you go regularly, but you never really share what's going on in your heart. Let me encourage you to share what's going on in your heart. Don't hold people at arm's length away. Divulge what's going on. Don't just attend. Become an active member of a life group. When you sense discouragement in someone, remind them of Christ in their place. When they're experiencing joy, remind them of Christ in their place.

Gazing at Jesus in the gospel is what preserves, sustains and strengthens us as we await Christ's return. Since

we're safe in Christ, let's await Christ with alertness, self-control and hope. We can look forward to Christ's return in the future because of what he has done in the past. Resting in his work on the cross is what lifts our spirits as we safely await his return. See the day of the Lord, when Christ returns will be dreadful, destructive and righteous. All the wrongs in the world will be made right. The justice we all long for will be delivered. Extortioners and robbers will be exposed. Men who abuse women will be judged. The greedy who manipulate others for their gain will become poor. Corrupt politicians who use their power to serve themselves will be humbled. The sharp tongue will hear the judgment of God. Every single person in sin will experience God's full wrath in a way that will make Noah's flood look like a kitty pool and the fire of Sodom and Gomorrah look like fireworks on the 4th of July. It will be a great and dreadful day.

And in the book of Exodus, there is a similar day foretold. See, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, and God had chosen them as a special people, but they were enslaved by a man named Pharaoh. And he used them as slave labor. And when God sent Moses to command Pharaoh to let them go, Pharaoh refused. And so God sent nine signs like many of us are familiar with, to rescue them. But Pharaoh's heart was hardened.

And so it wasn't until God sent this final 10th sign that he will let them go. And that final tenth sign was the death of every firstborn in the land. It was a sign meant to symbolize the devastating, death producing effects of sin to every person, Jew or Egyptian. And so to protect his people, God commanded the Israelites to sacrifice a lamb and to paint its blood over the doorpost of their home, symbolizing that death had already taken place in that house. And that death need not enter. Death can just pass on by. And so as the sun set on that day, I'm sure many were anxious. I'm sure that many knew God was powerful and that he judged sin perfectly. I'm sure many Israelites waited anxiously in their homes as the darkness crept in.

There probably wasn't much laughter in the city that day, as Israelite after Israelite dipped into the Lamb's blood and painted it over their doorpost. But as they did what God commanded, they were guaranteed safety from the wrath to come. No Israelite needed to fear God's judgment on that night, because the blood of the lamb had been spilled in their place, and was painted over the doorpost. And in a similar way, we as believers need not fear the day of the Lord because the blood of Christ, the lamb of God has been slain in our place. His blood covers us. And so we can confidently, expectantly await Christ's return with joy. And we can do it by being alert, self-controlled and filled with hope.

Any and all who are in Christ need not fear. His blood has already been spilled for you. You are safe in Christ. So let's await that day in the ways that he's commanded. But if you're in this room and you're watching online and you are feeling acutely aware of the fact that you're not safe because you're not in Christ, let me encourage you to look at Christ, to run to him. He loves to welcome in sinners. He loves to call the unrighteous. He loves sick people. He really does. He wants you. And he wants to let you experience that kind of safety so that when he returns, that day need not be fearful for you. But it might be a day that you can look for and long for, with alertness, self-control and hope.

Let's pray. Jesus, we are so grateful that you have not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through Jesus Christ, that your blood and your death has secured for us, everlasting life, everlasting relationship with yourself. Thank you for giving up your life for ours. Help us to wait for your day with confidence because of your sacrifice. We pray this in your name, amen. Let's stand and sing.



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