

## **Living in the Last Days: Understanding the Last Days**

Many of us flew to the convention, and for many of those who flew this was the first time that you remembered flying. If you sat in a window seat (or even if you did not), maybe you had the same experience I did—you wanted to look out the window because you do not have many opportunities to see the earth from 35,000 feet.

God has enabled us to see history from 35,000 feet. God has revealed in the holy scriptures the big picture of what he is doing in the history of the world. All things happen for the purpose of the return of Jesus Christ. We know and believe that Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, is returning to judge the living and dead. Paul speaks of the return of Christ in 1 Thessalonians 4, beginning in verse 13 and continues to address his return in chapter 5.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:1–8, the theme text for the convention, we are called to live in the hope of Christ's return. Paul does not address when Christ will come: "But of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you." He goes on to say the wicked will be surprised at Christ's coming. His coming will be like a thief in the night, who catches the unsuspecting homeowners by surprise. But for believers Christ's return will not be surprise because we are watching. The focus of the passage is our calling to watch. Are we watching diligently? As we live our lives in the present, do we think about the future return of Christ? This is what we want to consider in this speech.

We will watch for Christ's coming and live soberly only when we know that God saves us because he loves us. We will watch with hope for Christ's coming only when we understand the beauty of what Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:9–10: "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him."

God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation. This refers to the truth of predestination. God has appointed some to wrath—to suffer in hell endlessly for their sins. But he has appointed us to obtain salvation. What is this salvation? This salvation includes the forgiveness of sins and deliverance from the wrath of God we deserve. But it is more than this. God gives us the highest blessing. He gives us everlasting life with Him in heavenly glory. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 emphasizes this: "And

so shall we ever be with the Lord.” And this is the salvation that Paul describes in chapter 5:10: “That...we should live together with him.”

God has given this salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us. The Lord, the second person of the Holy Trinity, who is sovereign over suffering, willingly endured suffering and death for us. He did this willingly because of the greatness of his love for us.

Does this move you? What does this stir up in your souls when you hear this? It should stir up in our souls gratitude for the great things God has done. When we understand with believing hearts that God has appointed us to this salvation, we want the fullness of this salvation, which is living together with God. We have this when Christ returns.

Because we want the fullness of salvation, we want Jesus to come so that we can see him face-to-face. We want to see the Savior, who died for us and rose again. This is the best thing about heaven—seeing God in the face of Jesus. We should want Jesus to come because we want to see him and praise him forever. This is why the saints in Thessalonica wanted Jesus to return. They wanted to see Jesus. This led to some wrong thinking on their part. They thought Jesus was coming at any moment. But they wanted Jesus to come. The danger for us is that we do not think about the coming of Jesus or really want his return.

Just as we want to see each other face-to-face as friends, so also we should want to see our sovereign friend, Jesus, face-to-face. Some of you came to the convention to be reunited with old friends that you met at previous conventions. You text, FaceTime, Skype, Facebook, and/or email each other. But none of that is the same as seeing each other face-to-face. Even with all this technology that makes communication so much easier, you would not be happy with a virtual convention that would take place with webcams in different locations. You want to see each other face-to-face.

The same must be true in our relationship to Jesus. We see him in the scriptures and in the preaching. But this is not enough for us. We want more. We want to see him face-to-face when he returns in the clouds of heaven.

Is seeing Jesus the most important thing in our lives? We live in a world of a million distractions that seem much more fun than seeing Jesus. This world in which we live is intoxicating with all of its good things. Instead of using these good things to serve God, we often set our hearts on these things. But the greatest longing of our hearts should be seeing the Savior who died for our sins. When this is our greatest longing, we will be watching for Him. When this is our greatest longing, we will want to understand the last days in which we live and how Satan is trying to distract us from watching for Jesus' return.

Part of watching for Christ's return is understanding these last days in which we live. We must understand how Satan is attacking the church through this world that so appeals to our sinful flesh. We live in last days that are grievous and painful to endure because of these attacks. I will mention five areas of attack and concern for us as we watch for Jesus' return.

**Satan is attacking us with the individualism of our age.** We live in a world that tells us that we should live for self. The world says that what is most important is my own personal happiness. Do what feels good. Follow your heart (not Christ). This appeals to our sinful flesh. The danger is that this individualism affects our view of the church and belonging to Christ. We begin to think what the church should be doing for me, instead of how I must serve Christ and His church. If we follow this through, then the standard for what church I belong to becomes my own happiness, instead of the objective standard of the marks of the true church given in scripture.

**Satan is attacking us with the materialism of our age.** We live in an age of unprecedented wealth and prosperity, which puts us in a dangerous position. Remember what Jesus said about riches: it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Remember 1 Timothy 6:10, "The love of money is the root of all evil..." Satan wants the church to lose her identity in the world by focusing on riches, enjoyment, and pleasures, instead of pursuing Christ and his truth. The danger for you is that you look at future employment only from the perspective of how much you can make instead of developing the gifts God gives and trusting that God will provide what you need to work hard to develop those gifts.

**Satan is attacking us with false teachings.** There are so many false philosophies and false teachings in our day, but the main one of our age is postmodernism, which says that there is no one, objective truth. Every person in this world is on a journey to find truth, and it may be different for everyone. In postmodernism feelings are king and the standard for truth instead of God's word. The danger is that if this is absorbed into the church, every false doctrine will be allowed into the church because it does not matter anymore what you believe and what the scriptures say. In our day we must seek to find truth in the scriptures and live by that objective truth.

**Satan attacks us through the technology of our age.** Technology, which includes iPads, computers, and smart phones, are not evil. But the danger is that they are used wrongly. One of the great dangers we face is the sexual immorality that is so easily accessible online. I am afraid for the young men and young women who have smart phones, iPods, or computers with no accountability. We need accountability and software that will help us to remain pure in our use of the technology of our day.

**Finally, Satan attacks through suffering.** There are many ways that young people are suffering today. They face depression, family struggles, diseases that affect them, and, probably the hardest, being hurt by other people. Satan wants us to question the goodness of God and feel sorry for ourselves. But we must remember that we have a suffering Savior who uses suffering in our lives for our good. Suffering is a great blessing in our lives. We must learn how to respond to suffering by trusting in God and obeying his voice.

As we live in these last days facing many attacks from Satan, let us remember that Christ is victorious. 1 Thessalonians 5 emphasizes the victory of Jesus Christ. Satan is not in control in this world. Christ is! He is controlling all things in this world for the sake of the spread of the gospel and the final victory of his kingdom. This is part of what we must be watching for. We watch the unfolding of Christ's work in the history of the world and in the church.

Let us be assured that Christ is coming to gather his church so that we may live with him forever. And we will see him face-to-face. What a day that will be!

