



**Sermon Notes: Steve Stanis,
“Ready and Waiting”**

08 Sep 2024

Readings: Psalm 23, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

Do you remember playing Hide and Seek?

Maybe you played it as a child, or a parent or a grandparent. The person who is “in” closes their eyes and counts while the other players hide. When the person gets to the agreed upon number they shout out **“Coming, ready or not”** and go in search of those hiding.

Can you hear the deep spiritual truth in this game that we explore in this passage today?

‘Coming, ready or not’ will happen. Jesus will return.

Today’s sermon title, **‘Ready and Waiting’** is at the top end of the scale. [A scale is a continuum with a successive number of gradations from one extreme to the other.]

‘Coming, ready or not’ lacks hope and joy, two qualities we have seen in the Thessalonian Church. This is a church who are ‘Ready and waiting’. The Thessalonian church expected Jesus to come soon. But since Paul had suddenly left them a year or so before, some of their members had died.

Now Timothy reports to Paul a widespread speculation among church members that these newly dead believers would miss out entirely; that Christ’s return would be too late for them.

Today, the anticipation of Jesus’ second coming remains a central aspect of Christian hope.

Over the centuries, many have tried to interpret what this event will look like, when it will happen, and what signs we should watch for. This fascination has given rise to various interpretations, some of which are quite dramatic.

What does it mean to be ready and waiting for Jesus’ return?

Paul’s words in 1 Thessalonians were written to offer hope and encouragement to a young church facing persecution and uncertainty but they were ready and waiting.

Paul writes, (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17): “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of an archangel and the trumpet of God.

The dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will always be with the Lord”.

This passage is full of powerful imagery; trumpets, loud commands, and clouds; but it’s crucial to recognise that Paul is using metaphorical language to convey a deeper truth.

Let’s consider the imagery Paul uses.

First, Paul echoes the story of Moses coming down from Mount Sinai with the Torah.

The people had been waiting anxiously at the foot of the mountain, and when Moses finally descended, there was the sound of a trumpet, a loud voice, and a dramatic revelation. Paul uses this imagery to convey the sense of awe and anticipation that will accompany Jesus’ return.

Second, Paul draws from the imagery of Daniel (7), where “one like a son of man” is vindicated over the pagan enemies and raised to sit with God in glory.

In the Gospels, this image is applied to Jesus, and Paul extends it to Christians who are facing persecution, assuring them that they too will be vindicated and share in Christ’s glory.

Third, Paul invokes the image of an emperor visiting a colony or province.

In the ancient world, when an emperor approached a city, the citizens would go out to meet him in the open country and then escort him back into the city with great fanfare.

Paul’s image of believers meeting the Lord in the air is meant to convey a similar sense of joyous anticipation. The people meet the Lord in the air, not to be taken away, but to welcome Him into the renewed creation.

Paul’s mixed metaphors of trumpets, clouds, and being “caught up” are not meant to be taken as a literal description of what will happen at the end of time. Instead, they are a vivid and powerful way of expressing the hope, joy and assurance that Jesus **will** return and that when He does, everything will be made new.

Then to this faithful church, Paul urges them “not to be asleep but to be awake and sober” (v6).

This verse reminded me of the 1978 released Keith Green song, ‘Asleep in the Light’. It goes like this:

*The world is sleeping in the dark
That the church just can't fight
'Cause it's asleep in the light*

*How can you be so dead
When you've been so well fed?*

*Jesus rose from the grave
And you, you can't even get out of bed*

Don't you care, don't you care?

Are you going to let them drown?

How can you be so numb, not to care if they come,

You close your eyes and pretend the job's done

Green’s song was a wakeup call to the church for being so apathetic in reaching lost people and offering them the hope of Jesus.

This is my **first application**.

The Lord is still calling his church to wake from apathy: (1 Thessalonians 5:5), “You are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we do not belong to the night, or to the darkness.”

From (Matthew 5:14): “You are the light of the world”.

We must let our light shine before all people so that when they may see our good works, they will glorify our Father in heaven. Is your light shining?

Our service on Sunday 22nd at 2pm celebrates the lights who have shined into our lives. Join us for this Remembrance Service. The challenge is that we continue to shine the light of Christ into our current relationships now.

The **second application** is, that as people of the day, we are called to put on our spiritual armour. As Paul writes, “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” (1 Thessalonians 5:8).

In (Ephesians 6: 11-18), Paul writes about spiritual warfare. He mentions six pieces of spiritual armour to “stand against the devil’s schemes.”

They include:

- (1) the belt of truth,
- (2) the breastplate of righteousness,
- (3) the shoes of the gospel of peace,
- (4) the shield of faith,
- (5) the helmet of salvation and
- (6) the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.

Paul is emphasising the breastplate and the helmet. The breastplate protects your heart, and the helmet protects your mind.

“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

God does not want us to be spiritually asleep.

He wants us to wake up and put on the spiritual armour so we can “stand firm against the devil’s schemes”.

This was the focus of our day of prayer, to be free to live by claiming the victory of Christ.

We had a great day on Saturday. Thank you Colleen for your insights into our prayer lives.

It is our spiritual armour that will keep us ready and waiting for the Lord’s return.

The **third application** comes in Verse 11; “Therefore encourage one another, and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

Remember in Chapter 4:9 the Thessalonian church was encouraged in their love for each other, but Paul added, keep loving more and more.

Now here in Chapter 5 the Thessalonian church is encouraging each other and Paul urges them to keep doing this more and more.

The “one another” commands of the New Testament, paint a picture of the beauty of human relationships. This is part of the process of the Spirit transforming us.

Relationships of encouragement make a captivating community. Encouragement leads to unity because we are looking for the best in each other.

Awake each day with a heart to express care and concern for another without any desire for self-benefit.

Connect with another to encourage them by asking questions, listening, offering to pray, love and serve them in ways that will make a difference for each of them.

Our goal is to build each other up as the people of God. Real encouragement is one way we experience the Holy Spirit together. It’s how we experience real community together.

And this kind of community is not life-depleting but life-enriching, not guarded and aloof, but all-in and involved, not scrutinising and criticising, but affirming and strengthening.

Our encouragement of the people of God is crucial because it is within this community that we are nurtured and equipped to live out our faith in the world.

We are called to be a light in the darkness, a beacon of hope, an expression of our joy in Christ and a testimony to the transforming power of Christ in our lives, as we wait for His return.

Life is not a game. Jesus will return, whether we are ready or not.

Let’s hold on to the promise that Paul gives us: “We will all be with the Lord forever” (1 Thessalonians 4:17b).

This is the good news that we are called to share with the world.

This is a message of hope and joy.

Jesus is coming again, and when He does, we will be transformed, and all of creation will be renewed.

Until that day, as we live, **ready and waiting**, as people of light, let us shine the love and hope of Christ into a world that desperately needs it.

Amen.