

## "When?" 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 Advent Midweek 3 2022

What are some of the things that you do to pass the time when you are using public transportation? I travelled daily downtown to Calgary for several years, and I liked to bring along some reading. Other times, I would do some work on my computer. Sometimes, I liked to just sit and watch the other people who travelled with me.

Sometimes you get a little extra time to watch people because your flight, bus or train is delayed. It can be very interesting to watch people as they react to the knowledge that they will not be on time.

Some people behave as though the ticket agent is to blame the delay. They stand near the ticket counter and glare at the agent as though that will help. Other people get depressed. The late flight or ride is just one more thing to go wrong in their lives. You can see them sitting around waiting for the next disaster to strike.

Some view the delay as an opportunity to party. "There's a lounge nearby where we can watch the Leafs, have a drink, and eat a few chicken wings. Let's go!" Others take a trip delay in stride. They know enough to build a little extra time into their travel plans.

Different personality types wait for things in different ways. The Apostle Paul was writing to people who were waiting for the Lord to return to judge the world. They also exhibited different behaviors as

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they waited for the Lord. What kind of person are you when it comes to waiting for Christ to come?

Some people desperately want exact dates and times. For example there was a NASA engineer named Edgar Whisenant. He tried to use his mathematical skills to set a date for Christ's return. He even wrote a book: 88 Reasons why the Rapture will take Place in 1988. He was so certain that Jesus would return on September 10, 1988 that he said, "If I'm wrong then the scripture is mistaken." He knew for certain that Jesus would arrive that day.

But Jesus says that the angels didn't know, and Jesus himself doesn't know (Matthew 24:36), but amazingly enough, Edgar Whisenant did know. September 10, 1988 came and passed. The old saying held true, "If first you don't succeed, fail and fail again." Edgar wrote a second book the next year claiming he forgot that the calendar didn't start with one but with year zero, so he said he was a year off. He failed again.

We should not be surprised for the Apostle Paul wrote, [1 Thessalonians 5:1-2] "Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief

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in the night." Jesus Himself said, [Acts 1:7] "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority."

There are some things that we are not meant to know until it happens. One of them is our last day on this earth ... whether that day comes at our death or it comes when the Lord returns. Paul compared the Day of the Lord to a thief in the night. Jesus did that a few times as well. He said, [Luke 12:39–40] "But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. 40 You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." Later in He said, [Revelation 3:3] "I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you." How does a thief come? He comes unexpectedly. He comes when we are unaware. A thief doesn't call ahead.

Contrary to those who demand an exact time table are those who believe that Jesus is not really coming after all. Paul writes about these people with these words: [1 Thessalonians 5:3] 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.

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Paul compares our wait to a pregnancy. We all know that a pregnant woman is going to have a baby. There is no escape. Just so, Paul says to the doubters, you will not escape.

When people don't really believe that Jesus is coming, it is easy for them to become indifferent and apathetic to the gospel. These people soon fall asleep spiritually. Some of us need a divine wakeup call! The Apostle Paul writes, [1 Thessalonians 5:6] "So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober."

Then there are those who are in denial about death. Deep down inside, they know that all people die, but they live and make decisions as though they will never die. Very often, such people fool themselves through continuous entertainment.

Some people deny death by burying reality in a lifetime of parties and outward celebration. They have a great time as long as the party lasts, but reality has a way of catching up with everyone. Sooner or later, we must all leave this world. Those who are not ready because they spend life trying to be happy are often the saddest of all. They party through a lifetime, but they will suffer through eternity.

Those who are ready to leave this world know that Jesus already came to this world long ago. He came to arrange for our salvation. He did that by living a perfect life in our place and then suffering the

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punishment we deserved for our sins as He hung on a cross and died. Three days after He died, He rose from the dead, and, with His resurrection, He demonstrated the exit plan that He arranged for all those who believe in Him. By His resurrection, He promised to deliver us from sin and raise us to a new life when we leave this world.

Those who are ready want other people to have an exit strategy! They say to their loved ones, friends, co-workers, anyone who will listen: "We don't have an arrival time, but Christ is on his way. He won't let us down. Don't be afraid. Be alert, though, because he could show up at any time! And when he comes he will take us home!" Amen