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"Stay in the Light" *1 Thessalonians 5:1-11*

—We might be tempted to build a selfish empire in this dark world, but trust in God's salvation can keep us in the light. The devil wants us to hide in the dark, but we don't need to choose darkness. God is on our side!

In his book, "The Great Divorce," C.S. Lewis says that the return of Christ is like a sunrise over a dark world. When the sunrise comes, the light is so bright that no shadows can exist! While we wait for Christ to return, it is like we are living in those moments before the sunrise. There is light all around, but it is a sort of twilight. The sun has not yet appeared over the horizon. C.S. Lewis suggests that living in the in-between time where Christ has ascended to heaven, but has not returned yet, is like living in the twilight with dawn about to break at any second.

But Jesus's return poses a huge problem for people that live in and love the darkness. All the dark things of this world will be destroyed because the light of Christ is so bright. That means that believers in Christ who continue to build a life in the dark will suddenly be all alone, and the dark things they love will be no more. That sounds scary and sad to me. So, for the sake of your own eternal souls, build your life up in the light of Christ, so that the things you know and love will continue with you when the light of Christ has risen and eternity begins! This is the message that Paul commends to the church in our passage from 1 Thessalonians this morning.

Like C. S. Lewis, Paul uses the images of light and dark to describe this in-between time we live in while we wait for Jesus. Light and dark are used as images in the bible consistently from beginning to end. To say that light represents good and dark represents bad is too simple. After all, many people think that good is a subjective thing. That means each person has a different idea about what is good. As Christians, we believe that only God can decide what is good. Psalm 100:5 says that "The Lord is

good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.” This is probably the best biblical definition of what good means. God is good. But many people don’t think like that.

So instead of “good” let us say that Light represents the will of God. Those thoughts, actions, and relationships that are all in line with God’s way of living, are in the light. In contrast, darkness represents anything that is not the will of God. The will of God is revealed to us by Jesus, and through the scriptures passed down to us. Even though we are saved by our faith in Jesus, we each can choose every day if we want to live the way God wants, or the way we want. Living life God’s way pleases God. When we seek to please God first in our lives and not ourselves or others, we are staying in the light.

In Paul’s letter to the Thessalonian church, Paul urges us to stay in the light while we wait for Christ to return. What Paul means is that we need to keep choosing to live as God commands while we wait for Jesus to return. Paul gives us three important pieces of information about living in the light that we are to be mindful of as we wait for Jesus. First, it is for our own good that we live in the light, because all things that are done in the dark will be destroyed when Jesus returns. Second, Faith, Hope, and Love in Christ can protect us from the dark while we wait. Third, we need other people to encourage us to stay in the light.

First, Paul writes that it is for our own good that we live in the light as we wait for Jesus. Let me explain, In his letter, Paul wrote about when Jesus returns like a thief in the night, “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.” And Paul also wrote “You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.” Here, Paul makes a poetic connection between the dark and destruction, because a thief steals in the dark. Paul also reminds us that we belong in the light.

Paul reminds us that this world and all things that are not of God on it will pass away when Jesus returns. I like the way we read about this in 2 Peter 3:10 which says, “The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be burned up.” Whatever we build in the shadow of this world will pass away. But whatever we do in Christ’s name will live forever. Paul wants to save us from unnecessary heartbreak and suffering we will experience if we live in the night. Let me give an example.

Some children love to build with blocks or lego bricks. I have seen children put hours and hours of effort into building intricate castles and figures. Somehow these kids forget that sooner or later, they are going to have to clean up. I really believe that some of these young builders do not believe that their creation is only temporary. All it takes is clean-up time or a mischievous sibling to come along and then, the block creation is no more. But then the child cries for hours. You would think that someone just put the child's dog to sleep by the pain they seem to feel. This is like the pain that Paul is hoping that we can avoid. If we build our life around material things that we love, we might be severely disappointed when Jesus returns. Houses and cars and dishes and furniture are shadow things that will topple when Jesus returns. Paul reminds us that it is for our own good that we live in the light while we wait for Jesus.

Second, Faith, Hope, and Love in Christ can protect us from the dark while we wait. Paul writes that faith and love are a breastplate and the hope of salvation is a helmet. Paul says that Christians living a simple, godly life are like soldiers fighting a war. At first it may seem like a stark contrast between a simple worker and a soldier! And yet, even as simple Christians, our enemy is fierce. It is the sin in the world that is constantly trying to pull us out of the light and into the shadows. In 1 Peter 3:8, we read, "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." Evil is a real force. And it wants to build up selfish empires in this dark world so that the devil will win. The devil doesn't want to torture us directly in this life. The devil wants us to be as successful in the world as we can. Just as long as we don't live for Christ at all. Sometimes the devil doesn't look like a monster, sometimes the devil looks like a car, or a second home, a better vacation, or a more important job. On the surface these things seem great! But the devil is always looking to move our focus onto ourselves and what we want. That means moving our focus away from God and others. It is sneaky, and it is hard to resist!

That is why we need armor if we are going to defend ourselves. We need to have faith in Jesus and love for Christ and one another. We must have hope in our salvation. Humans are simple creatures. We most often weigh our choices and choose whichever choice gives us the most benefit. That is why Faith, Hope, and Love are needed to balance the scales so that God's will wins over our own will. Only faith, hope, and love will cause us to value the eternal glory of God over the temporary pleasures of right now. We have faith that God is real and loves us. We have love for God for all God does for us. We have hope that heaven is real and worth investing in. We build faith, hope, and love when we remind ourselves that we believe in God's saving love in Jesus Christ. That is why we repeat the same things over and over again in Church! We need

to keep our armor in Good shape! Faith, Hope, and Love in Christ can protect us from the dark while we wait for Jesus to return.

The third piece of information Paul gives us about living in the light is that we need other people to encourage us to stay in the light. Often our own faith, hope, and love is not always enough to keep us from making selfish choices. Jesus teaches us that we need a community of believers around us if we are to stay in the light. This is one of the most important reasons we need to be in some kind of worshipping community with other believers. Those of us that are saved by our faith, but do not spend significant time each month worshipping and learning with other believers are at a disadvantage. They have the darkness of selfish desires seducing them constantly, but they have very little contact with other believers to build them up in their hope of God's salvation.

It is hard enough to choose God and others over yourself when you are in worship and bible study most weeks. But if you don't have that, who in your life is reminding you that all your money and material goods will not continue on into heaven? Who in your life is reminding you that choosing to give money and time to other people is more important than giving money and time to yourself. Making selfish decisions is how we build up a shadow empire in this life that will be destroyed when the light of Christ rises. A community of other believers can hold us accountable to make choices for God and others and not only ourselves. After all, living in the light, builds relationships and character that will last forever. Light does not destroy light, light only destroys darkness. We need other people to encourage us and build us up so we stay in the light.

In our scripture passage this morning, Paul gives us three important pieces of information about living in the light that we are to be mindful of as we wait for Jesus. First, it is for our own good that we live in the light, because all things that are done in the dark will be destroyed when Jesus returns. Second, Faith, Hope, and Love in Christ can protect us from the dark while we wait. Third, we need other people to encourage us to stay in the light.

So hold to these things. Stay in the light as we wait for Jesus to return. But also, be confident that everything we do in the light is safe and secure, and will not fade, but only shine brighter when Jesus returns and the light of Christ rises like the sun, destroying all twilight and darkness forever.