

"Children of Light"

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10

Oh come Thou Dayspring from on high and cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Christians at times lose the battle of public debate by yielding in ways they believe to be inconsequential. This is true both in our discussions with false-teaching Christians and with the godless. An example of the former is, when confronted with the withholding of baptism from children, we accepted the premise that it was our responsibility to prove that the Bible promotes infant baptism. Accepting that premise was both foolish and unnecessary. The correct course of action would have been to demand that the burden of proof lay with anyone who tried to limit the Biblical "baptize all nations" in God's Word.

We are making a similar mistake today when we allow "sin" to be defined as *"that which harms or infringes on the rights of another human being."* Sin is sin because it violates God's Word and will. Allowing sin to be defined any other way is both foolish and perilous.

Here's how the problem plays out. Several powerful men have been "outed" recently as sexual predators. This is a good thing because such actions are contrary to God's Word. The problem is that men are being called to account for doing what *women* do not want them to do. No one seems to be talking about what God wants. Yet what these men are doing isn't a sin because *women* don't want it, or because women object. It is sin because *God* objects, because God labels it as sin. Women are certainly victims, but it is *God's* laws that have been violated.

When you look at it that way, our society's moral depravity becomes even more obvious and ominous. No one would be talking about any of this *if the women involved hadn't objected*. "Consensual" just means that *both* are sinning, and yet the world believes that "consensual" somehow makes everything okay. To put that another way, according to our society it's human opinion that makes conduct right or wrong. God's will plays absolutely no role in how they judge conduct. It never enters the discussion. What we are therefore witnessing in our immoral society is exactly what happens when this or any other society rejects God's ultimate authority and removes him from their lives.

Yet it is times like this when the words of our text for this morning ring the truest and shine the brightest, for they not only provide both clarity and a warning (together with much needed comfort and assurance) they reveal incredible opportunity. Here we are taught the title that God has assigned to us (Children of Light) and of the sacred calling and position into which he has placed us as lights in an ever-darkening world. Our text is found recorded in Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians, the Fifth Chapter:

ESV 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 *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 in the night. 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. ⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. ⁶ So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.*

This is God's Word. Remind yourself each time you hear or read words from the Bible that these are God's words, and that they therefore offer perfect, divine wisdom and insights for all generations. God himself has told us, **"Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and treasure it!"** As we prepare to hear and study these words of our God, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."** Amen.

As told by those who survived, there was an eerie time after the Titanic hit the iceberg when all was calm and all seemed well. The general feeling on board was that they had had a brush with disaster but had escaped. In other words, though their ship was actually mortally wounded and therefore doomed, no one knew. Planet earth hit its own "iceberg" already back when Adam and Eve were the only passengers. It has always therefore been a doomed ship – irreparably broken and destined for destruction. The inevitable result of that disaster is that the

darkness of sin and unbelief will continue to reign until earth's final destruction.

What does that mean for you and me? Several things, really. It explains why God put us here, and why he refers to us in our text as **"Children of light."** God never intended that we should be part of the darkness. In fact the current darkness in our world reminds us just how important it is that we simply be what our God has created us to be – lights, shining ever brighter in an ever darker world. We get that picture, but what we need to know, to fully understand, is what exactly that means in our day-to-day lives.

Countless ships have been lost at sea. The sinking of the Titanic probably gained such notoriety because it was filled with the rich and powerful. Those who were there and survived told of wealthy passengers trying to bribe stewards to grant them a seat on one of the lifeboats. The stewards, knowing that they themselves would not survive, laughed at the idea that earthly wealth held any value to them at a time like that. When someone is about to go to the bottom of the ocean, a pocket full of gold or jewels suddenly becomes just so much ballast.

That is, in fact, how children of light are supposed to live every moment of every day – recognizing the absolute, ultimate worthlessness of material things when held up to the light of eternity.

Christians can recognize another aspect of the sinking of the Titanic that makes that event so riveting: the almost uncanny application of a section of our text. In verses 2-4 we read, **"For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 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."** The Titanic was thought to be unsinkable. At the moment disaster struck, its passengers therefore rested under the illusion of "peace and security" – and the destruction, when it came, was absolutely unavoidable for all but those in the lifeboats. Also worth noting was that in that time of "peace and security," no one seemed all that interested in the lifeboats. When disaster struck, nothing *but* the lifeboats mattered.

Relatively few in our world are concerned about their greatest need: the lifeboat that is Jesus Christ and the Christian faith. The darkness that is unbelief blinds them to the need; blinds them even to the *value* or *worth* of that for which they see no need. In their minds, life on earth will simply go on as it has always gone on – just as the Titanic would always steam on.

In fact the theme song to the movie Titanic demonstrates that even when disaster brings death, the darkness of unbelief fools the world into believing that somehow death does not usher in the day of reckoning. All will simply "go on."

Clearly this is delusional, wishful thinking on the part of those who have no part in Jesus Christ. In our text the Holy Spirit through Paul reminded us that **"those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night."** "Night" is used here as a metaphor of the darkness of unbelief and "drunkenness" as a representation of the thoughts and attitudes of those who exist in that darkness. Their thoughts can never have any sort of truth or clarity because they exist in a world of darkness. That means that even when God sends earthly reminders of the approaching day of reckoning, the world will always drunkenly regard it as anything but what it truly is, what it truly foretells.

Yet what is the point, the value or worth, of spending time talking about the darkness of unbelief when Christians do not exist in that state? The answer, the problem, is that a part of each of us is, and will always be, drawn to that very darkness. When we have "put on" the new man (when we are Christ-minded and walking in harmony with the Holy Spirit's direction) the darkness is repulsive and unappealing. Yet there remains an evil within us (our sinful flesh) that finds that darkness desirable and intriguing. We need to do a better job of not only understanding the danger, but of recognizing the symptoms or warning signs.

Our text is therefore more than just a statement of facts. It is a warning. God the Holy Spirit would not have included such warnings if there were in fact no danger. The danger is that those who have been called into the light can be drawn back into the darkness. That means the God who loves us wants each of us, individually, to be able to recognize how and when we are being drawn in.

Here, again, is where you must supply your own personal information. You must comb through your own personal desires, thoughts, and tendencies. You must look into your own hearts and there take an honest inventory, asking this question: *"What aspect of the darkness appeals to me?"*

This requires both brutal honesty and sobriety, which is undoubtedly why our text says what it does: **"But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and**

for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him."

Note well that God doesn't expect us to carry out this self-evaluation on our own. He gave us not only the will to do it but the tools and the means. According to our text these include faith and love as our breastplate and the hope of salvation as our helmet. Note the divine acknowledgement here that human beings can be led by either or both the heart (emotion) and/or the mind. Both need the protection God offers in his Word. Faith and love form the breastplate that protects our emotions and "***the hope of salvation***" represents the helmet that protects our thoughts. Our human emotions are held in check by faith in Jesus Christ and purposeful love for our God and neighbor. Our human thoughts are protected by "***the hope of salvation***" in that a mind focused on eternal life through faith alone in Jesus Christ will find it difficult to become preoccupied with, and drawn away by, the temporal stuff of this world.

We read words like this, and suddenly it dawns on us that even when all is not well with the world, all can still be well with the true children of God. Those whose lives are not measured in dollars and possessions, but in their relationship with Jesus Christ, are divinely enabled to weather the ups and downs of this life, confident of that which will follow.

Rejoice then in your salvation and in the incredible title God himself has given you - *Children of Light*. Thank and praise the Creator of heaven and earth that he now regards you as his own dear child. You are indeed his child, but not because you earned that right or are in any way deserving or entitled. You are his dear child because he has drawn you into the light of his Son Jesus Christ. Without Jesus Christ, our world too would be only darkness – deep, impenetrable spiritual darkness, in which we would be forced to grope and scratch and claw as do the godless. It was Jesus who came not only as the light of the world but as the light that has illuminated our individual thoughts and emotions, enabling our adoption as God's children.

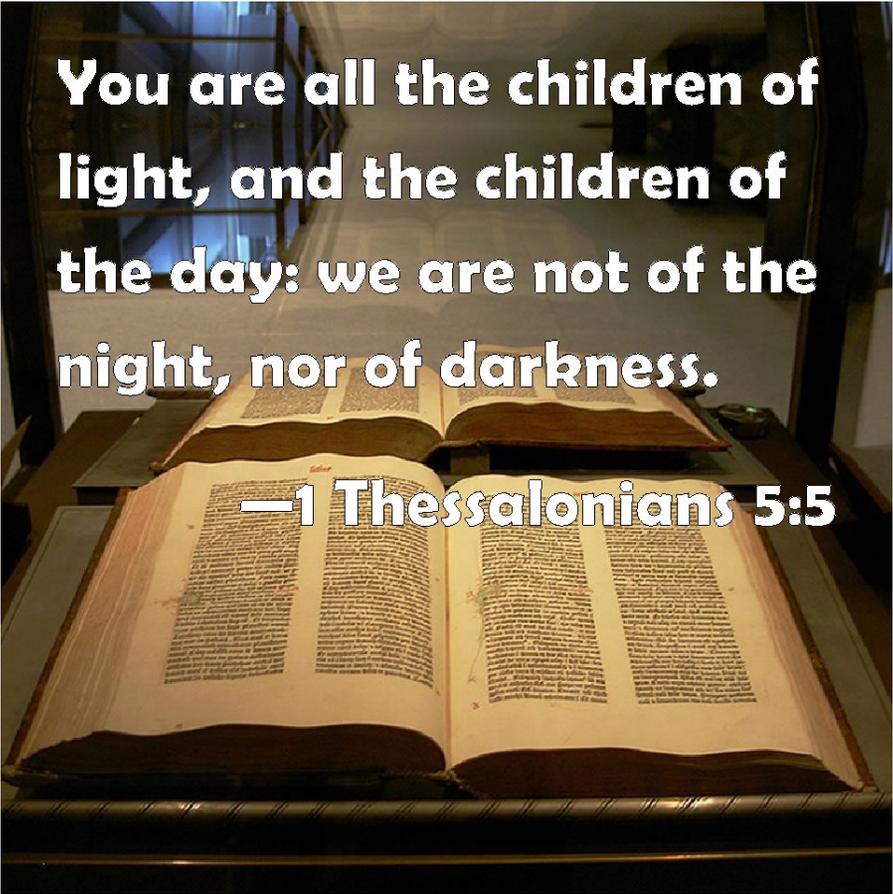
Shine therefore as the light you truly are. Give glory to your Savior in all things. Be sober, but joyful. Sorrow over sin, repenting, but rejoice in the forgiveness that God himself has declared to you through faith in Jesus Christ. With Jesus as your Savior, you are different. You are children of light and heirs of eternal life. Know then also, with absolute certainty – based on God's own promises – that your future is therefore very bright

indeed, for you will one day exist with God himself in the eternal light of his holy, divine presence. Amen.

ESV Zephaniah 1:7-8, 12-15 Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near; the LORD has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests. ⁸ And on the day of the LORD's sacrifice-- "I will punish the officials and the king's sons and all who array themselves in foreign attire... ¹² At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, 'The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill.' ¹³ Their goods shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste. Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them; though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them." ¹⁴ The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. ¹⁵ A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.

ESV Matthew 25:14-15, 19-30 "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away... ¹⁹ Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' ²¹ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' ²² And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' ²³ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' ²⁴ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' ²⁶ But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

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You are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

—1 Thessalonians 5:5

ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The 25th Sunday after Pentecost – November 19, 2023

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 611 (*Stanzas 1-5*) (*Red Hymnal*)

"The Day Is Surely Drawing Near"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (*Brown Hymnal*)

The Scripture Lessons: (*Printed on the back page of this bulletin*)

The Epistle Lesson: (Zephaniah 1:7-8, 12-15) Our society has been lulled into a certain complacency, especially in spiritual matters. One of the most dangerous by-products of this false sense of security is the notion that Judgment Day, if it even exists, will hold no terror for "good people" – as defined by the world. Our Old Testament lesson reminds us of the true nature of that Day for all unbelievers.

Psalm 100 (Supplement page 35) (*Brown Hymnal*)

The New Testament Lesson: (Matthew 25:14-15, 19-30) While the reality of Judgment Day should hold great terror for all unbelievers, it should hold no terror whatsoever for Christians. In fact it is the unique consolation of the children of God to know that they will stand unaccused and unafraid on that great day of reckoning. It is also true that while we await that day, we will seek to put to good use the gifts and talents that God has given us. This we long to do according to the new man within us, even though our service remains imperfect.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (*Brown Hymnal page 15*)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn - 794 (*Brown Hymnal*)

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem"

The Sermon – 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 (*Printed on the back page of this bulletin*)

"Children of Light"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 616 (*Alternate Melody*) (*Red Hymnal*)

"Forever with the Lord"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 611 (*Stanzas 6-7*) (*Red Hymnal*)

"The Day Is Surely Drawing Near"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (37) Average (43)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Thanksgiving Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor David Reim has returned calls to the newly formed dual parish of Calvary of Marquette and St. Peter's of Iron River. Pastor Luke Bernthal has returned the call to Immanuel of Mankato.

Church Council Notes – All members of the Church Council met on Sunday, November 12th. Treasurer Mantz reported that offerings for October were \$372 below budgeted needs but are still meeting budgeted needs YTD. The proposed 2024 budget calls for a 3.5% increase. \$600 was sent to our sister congregation in Mexico from the Benevolence Fund. Volunteers are still needed to do some painting in the church sanctuary. Several projects are being pursued by the Outreach Committee. The Council positions of Keith Mantz and Gary Miller are up for election in December, along with Gary Miller's Board of Elder's position. The next Council meeting is scheduled for December 4th at 5pm and the Annual Voters meeting for December 10th, along with a customary fellowship meal.

Thanksgiving Service – Our Thanksgiving service is scheduled for this Wednesday at 7pm. Beginning this Wednesday, Confirmation Class will begin at 5:45pm through Advent.

Church Christmas Party – The Annual Church Christmas Party has been scheduled for Saturday, December 2nd at 6:00 pm. The event is open to all, and all are encouraged to attend.