

Discerning the Day of the Lord

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3
Preached on: Sunday, April 3, 2016

It is my great joy to minister to you the word of God this morning and I would invite you to take your Bibles and turn to 1 Thessalonians 5. We would like to resume our study of this amazing epistle and this morning we will be focusing on really an astounding reality that is coming upon the world, the Day of the Lord. In fact, I've entitled my discourse to you this morning "Discerning the Day of the Lord." We will be looking at verses 1 through 3 of 1 Thessalonians 5. Let me read this to you.

1 Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. 2 For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. 3 While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape.

A common question that we hear these days among both the saved and the unsaved is basically this: where is the world headed? The radical left have fantasies of a Marxist utopia and we see that being forced upon us here in the United States today. The Muslims are looking for their Mahdi, their redeemer of Islam, the 12th imam. He's coming to slaughter all who will not worship Allah. He's coming to establish the everlasting world dominating kingdom of Islam, the final Caliphate which, of course, is Satan's counterfeit of the messianic kingdom. He will be coming with his army of black flags and on that flag there will be one word in Arabic, "Punishment," and, of course, we see that flag today: in the Iranian army we see it; the black flag of ISIS, and so forth; the black flag of Islamic jihad. The Jews are looking for their Messiah consistent with Old Testament prophecy. As Christians, we look for the Messiah as well and the coming kingdom, the difference is we know who the Messiah is because he already came once and he's coming again the second time. Our spiritual authority, of course, is the word of God, it's the Bible, and as we have just read history is moving inexorably towards a day of divine judgment; a day of unprecedented, unimaginably terrible judgment known as the Day of the Lord.

Now, biblically before this day comes, the world will continue to descend into an abyss of sin and chaos as Satan deceives the nations and prepares them for his rule through the antichrist and the false prophet. To help you see a little bit of this today, it is no coincidence that the most serious geopolitical problems that face the world today revolves around the two most Satanic, virulently expansionist ideologies in our modern day: fundamentalist Islam and Marxism. And in both Europe and the United States, citizens continue to elect leaders that have an affinity for both and historically we know

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that Marxism and Islam require violent force in order to survive as well as expand, and they both acknowledge that the greatest force against them, the greatest opposition against them is biblical Christianity. All we need to do is look at the seething hatred that the left has for Christians in the United States today and you see this. By attacking basic morality, the neo-Marxists of our day have created, for example, a burgeoning totalitarianism in the LGBT movement which is really an effort to essentially outlaw Christianity. Another example, in the early months of Obama's first term, the Department of Homeland Security produced a report warning about the threat of home grown, radicalized, militant and potentially violent extremists that are a threat to the country and you can only imagine who fits that profile, it's a person who is pro-gun, pro-life, pro-traditional family, concerned about illegal immigration or government debt or a military veteran returning home from active duty. Of course, the holy grail of socialism is government run health care which has been forced upon the American people despite the majority's unwillingness and opposition to embrace it. Worse yet, the United States is absolutely being invaded by Muslim immigrants, over 50% of which believe that the United States should allow them to be governed by sharia law; 25% believe that terrorism is justified if their religious beliefs are offended.

So, folks, the world in which we live is a powder keg ready to go off. About 25 or so of you joined many others in this room here yesterday for a security conference and one of the things that the speaker reminded us of is the fact that we need to be living in code red. There is code yellow, code orange and code red. Code yellow is to just be aware. Code orange is something isn't right. Code red is something bad is about to happen. But most people live in code white, utterly oblivious to all that is happening. But especially with the threat of nuclear and biological weapons and a weak America that was once a great deterrent to rogue nations and maniacal dictators, because of all of this we see that the world is a very dangerous place. So the metastasizing corruption of sin has now really reached critical mass here in the United States and this is consistent with the wrath of divine abandonment that we read about in Romans 1 where God finally gives people, and even a nation, over to a worthless mind to do that which is not proper and we see this all around us. The country is basically insane.

I'll give you an example. I was reading this last week according to the National Institute of Mental Health, they say that approximately 1/2 of the citizens of the United States of America suffer from some pathological mental disorder. That's frightening. And they vote. You see what's happening. And ironically there is one condition that is now in the process of being what they call de-pathologized, in other words, reclassified as normal and, folks, this is a condition that is so extreme that it involves the amputation of healthy body parts. It is a condition that is so extreme that the sufferers of this condition have one

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Online Sermons: otcr.org/content/sermon/1338/Discerning_the_Day_of_the_Lord.html

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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3
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of the highest suicide attempt rates of any population on earth, that of 41%. You probably guessed what it is, it's gender identity disorder which is now being reclassified, by the way, as gender dysphoria. Dysphoria is the opposite of euphoria so it's the idea of being dissatisfied with your maleness or your femaleness so you want to become the opposite sex. And the LGBT apologists claim that this is the result of public ignorance and intolerance which must be outlawed.

Folks, the lunatics are now running the American asylum and this is all part of Satan's plan and God is allowing it to happen to ultimately fulfill his purposes in glorifying himself. And although the world cries for peace and continues to embrace the radical left's destructive utopian fantasies which, frankly if you study it, bear enormous resemblance to the very things that Hitler promised Germany, despite all of this, we know that the world is moving towards unprecedented conflict and divine judgment. But we also know that God is sovereign over all things. He is allowing these things to happen, as I said, and his ultimate goal is the personal and glorious return of the Messiah King, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the establishment of his kingdom on this earth. This is where the world is ultimately heading and we can celebrate that. It's for this very reason as I remind you over and over again, Jesus commands us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

It's interesting that the last book of the Bible in the original language is called the Apocalypsis Yesu Kristo. Apo means to take away and calypsis is a cover so it's literally referring to an uncovering or an unveiling of Jesus Christ; a disclosure of that which has been concealed; a manifestation from God that lays bare that which has been hidden, namely the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the establishment of his kingdom, two great eschatological events that Jesus taught, events that are inseparable in human history. And it's interesting in the very opening verse of that book of Revelation, there is a magnificent announcement actually in verse 7, "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen." And then at the end of the book, Christ himself spoke from his throne in heaven making this promise in Revelation 22:20, "He who testifies to these things says," and, oh, I love this statement, "Surely I am coming soon." To which John and all God's people can reply, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

So, folks, all of history is moving in a carefully orchestrated direction by our sovereign God including his willingness to allow Satan to deceive millions, to deceive nations, to ultimately bring mankind to a place where he experiences the consequences of the insanity of his sin. But what we see here in 1 Thessalonians 5 and numerous other passages is that God has also promised to glorify himself not only in his saving grace but

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Online Sermons: otcr.org/content/sermon/1338/Discerning_the_Day_of_the_Lord.html

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in his damning wrath poured out upon a world system that is opposed to him and to his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ and this season of cataclysmic future judgment on the wicked is what is called the Day of the Lord. Even as God began the history of man when he created him, he is going to end the history of man when he judges him.

Now, biblically the Day of the Lord will be a period of judgments at the end of the seven year tribulation period just prior to Christ's physical return to this earth to establish his kingdom and we're going to see this this morning. It also will include a period of time at the end of the millennial reign of Christ on the earth. Peter speaks of this in 2 Peter 3:10 where we read, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up." Literally this is speaking of God uncreating that which he has created and then we know eschatologically from Scripture that he will recreate a new heaven and a new earth.

Now, bear in mind in terms of context that some of the Thessalonians were concerned that perhaps they were living during the Day of the Lord because of all the persecution that they were experiencing. Now, obviously they had been taught that they were not destined for this otherwise they would have rejoiced that some of their departed loved ones would be spared from those terrors but rather than that, they were grieving. Plus they would rejoice knowing the Lord was about to come but clearly they had been taught that they were going to be gathered up unto the Lord before all of his judgments upon the earth. So you will recall in order to comfort those saints, Paul explained to them that the rapture is going to precede all of this in chapter 4, verses 13 through 18, and he will go on to say in verse 9 of chapter 5, "for God has not destined us for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." He also says in Revelation 3:10 the same thing, "I will also keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world."

Now, a clarifying note: some argue that the church will go through the tribulation and then at the very end there will be some great snatching away. It's called a post-tribulational rapture. But if that were true, there would be no one left to populate the kingdom, right? Moreover, we must bear in mind, by the way, if all of them are raptured, who is going to populate the kingdom? It doesn't make sense. Moreover, Daniel's 70th week is for Israel, not for the church. And I might also add several other things: we see that the sequence of events at Christ's coming at the end of the tribulation are radically different than those described with respect to his second coming. For example, at the rapture, Christ gathers his own and they meet him in the air. At the second coming, we read that the angels gather the elect and the glorified church returns with him to the earth

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Online Sermons: otcr.org/content/sermon/1338/Discerning_the_Day_of_the_Lord.html

Discerning the Day of the Lord

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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3
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to establish the kingdom. Said simply, at the rapture, he comes for his saints, at the second coming, he comes with his saints. The emphasis of the rapture is resurrection but there is no mention of resurrection when Jesus returns to earth at his second coming, only judgment. At the rapture, the Lord snatches away true believers from the earth, but at the second coming, he takes away unbelievers. In the rapture passages, we read that Christ comes to reward believers, but at the second coming, he comes to judge the nations. And at the rapture, all of the unbelievers remain on the earth, they're still here, but at the second coming, they're all removed. It's only believers that remain on the earth and therefore populate the kingdom initially. The establishment of Christ's kingdom is never mentioned in the rapture passages, but they are the theme of those pertaining to the second coming. And at the rapture, believers will receive their glorified body, but nothing of the sort is mentioned in any of the related second coming passages.

So, again, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, Paul explains the rapture to those confused, grieving Thessalonians and then in verse 18 he says, "Therefore comfort one another with these words." However, here at the beginning of chapter 5, he instructs them about something very different, namely the Day of the Lord, and we're going to begin to examine that in the first three verses this morning. I've outlined it very simply for you. I hope this will be helpful. We're going to look first at the secrecy of the Day of the Lord; and then secondly, at the severity of the Day of the Lord.

Now, let's think about the secrecy of the Day of the Lord first. He begins in verse 1, "Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you." If we look at the original language here and understand what is being said, he's saying essentially this, "Now as to the times and the dates of events, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you." In other words, "You don't need to know the specific time or date when the Day of the Lord will actually happen." And bear in mind it's not just one day here, it's a period of time, a period of judgments that you will learn more about in a few minutes.

Now, evidently there were people in those days, as we have people in this day, that wanted specifics; they wanted to know actual dates. You will recall, for example, in Acts 1 just prior to Christ's ascent back into heaven Jesus gathered his disciples together, you will recall, and he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came upon them and the text says, "And they were asking him saying, 'Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?'" And he said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority." So they knew that the coming Day of the Lord was a secret known only to the Father. We learn from both biblical as well as even Jewish literature, that date setting was a common practice even

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Discerning the Day of the Lord

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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3
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among the ancients. For example, the prophet Daniel asked in Daniel 12:6, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?" And on several occasions the disciples asked Jesus, "Tell us when will these things be and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?" Matthew 24:3. But think what a disaster it would be if we knew the exact date, right? Just think about that. People would live in utter indifference until the time came and then all of a sudden they would panic and begin to prepare. Instead, we are to live our lives as if the Lord could come and snatch us away at any time. By the way, it's for this reason that only a pretribulational rapture preserves the doctrine of the imminency of Christ's return. Now, the unsaved who come to Christ after the rapture of the church during the tribulation will know that the Day of the Lord is very soon but they still won't know the exact time when Christ returns and the rest of the world will be utterly clueless, believing the lie of the antichrist that has explained the disappearance of millions of Christians.

So, again, Paul says, "Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night." So Paul reminds them of their previous instruction that he had given them pertaining to these things. Now, I want you to notice this phrase "the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night." I ask you: how does a thief come in the night? He comes unannounced, right? He comes unexpectedly, suddenly. He doesn't come to bring joy, he comes to bring heartache so this is not referring to the rapture as some might say but to the Day of the Lord. No one finds comfort in hoping for a thief to suddenly and unexpectedly bring tragedy into their life. Jesus used the same imagery in Matthew 24, beginning in verse 43, there he says, "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will." So in verse 3, Paul continues and he says, "While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape."

Now, as we piece together other Bible prophecies that address what will happen after the rapture of the church during the tribulation, one of the things that stands out is there will be a proliferation of false prophets deceiving the world in conjunction with the antichrist and his right arm guy who is called the false prophet. Some people think this may be the pope. We don't know. They will use great signs and wonders, Jesus tells us in Matthew 24:24. They will use these signs and wonders to deceive the world into believing that all is well with God, all is well with man, now that those divisive, narrow-minded, bigoted, obstructionist Christians have been removed from the earth. Paul describes the antichrist

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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3
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and his deceptions in 2 Thessalonians 2, beginning in verse 9, he says, "the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan," referring to the antichrist. He's coming "with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness."

So the satanically possessed antichrist will also have at his disposal a false prophet who will also be able to perform great signs and wonders to convince the people to worship the antichrist. We read about this, for example, in Revelation 13:13, "He will perform great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men." Let me pause for a second. Beloved, please understand that deceiving sinners into believing that they are at peace with God and that God is absolutely committed to their prosperity here on earth has always been the message of a false prophet. We see this to this day all the time. People love to hear that, and I might say that this is what some of you believe about yourself and I say this in love but out of great concern. Some of you actually think that you are at peace with God, that all is well, when in fact the wrath of God abides upon you because you are living in hypocrisy. You really have no love for Christ. You come and you show up for church, you sing the hymns, you speak the Christian talk, but you really in your heart do not love Christ. You really don't want much to do with him. You have no burden for the lost, no hunger for his word. It's a frightening thing and I might add that preachers these days typically don't preach on judgment because it doesn't sell. People don't want to hear these things. Instead they preach earthly peace and prosperity because that draws big crowds and those preachers can make big money from those big crowds.

You know, God spoke through Jeremiah and he warned them in a text that you don't have for the boards here, for the screens, he said in Jeremiah 6:13 describing these people, "For from the least of them even to the greatest of them, Everyone is greedy for gain, And from the prophet even to the priest Everyone deals falsely. They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, Saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace." Twenty six hundred years ago, Jeremiah warned his kinsmen to repent and to flee from the wrath of God that was about to come down upon Jerusalem through the hands of the Babylonians which was a foretaste of the judgment of the Lord, the Day of the Lord that will one day come upon the nations and he said this, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets,'" this is the Lord now speaking through Jeremiah. "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; They speak a vision of their own imagination, Not from the mouth of the

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Discerning the Day of the Lord

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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3
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LORD." And, beloved, I would submit to you that this is mainly what you hear on television and on the radio today. Do not listen to these people. "They keep saying to those who despise Me, 'The LORD has said, "You will have peace"'; And as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, They say, 'Calamity will not come upon you.'" But the Lord goes on and says, "who has stood in the council of the LORD, That he should see and hear His word? Who has given heed to His word and listened? Behold, the storm of the LORD has gone forth in wrath, Even a whirling tempest; It will swirl down on the head of the wicked. The anger of the LORD will not turn back Until He has performed and carried out the purposes of His heart; In the last days you will clearly understand it." And there he is reminding the people that what is about to happen, again, is a harbinger, a foretaste of the coming Day of the Lord that will occur before the Lord comes in power and great glory at the end of the tribulation. "In the last days you will clearly understand it." Verse 21, "I did not send these prophets, But they ran. I did not speak to them, But they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, Then they would have announced My words to My people, And would have turned them back from their evil way And from the evil of their deeds."

For forty years Jeremiah warned the people of coming judgment and they categorically dismissed everything that he said. They preferred instead the more pleasing message from the mouths of their own greedy prophets and priests and because Jeremiah spoke the truth, they threatened his life, they put him in stocks, they publicly humiliated him, they called him a false prophet and they threw him in a pit to die. But do you know what? Judgment came just as he said. The Babylonians utterly destroyed them, a preview of a far greater Day of the Lord. And, folks, today the message is the same: judgment is coming. You simply must repent. Oh, but people are offended when they hear that kind of thing. You know, speaking through his prophet Ezekiel, Ezekiel 13:10, the Lord describes false teachers saying, "they have misled My people by saying, 'Peace!' when there is no peace." So this is a theme that we see throughout Scripture, the same deception is here today.

Let's move from the secrecy of the Day of the Lord to the severity of it, number 2. It's important for all of us to understand the specifics of what will actually happen when the Lord begins to pour out his judgment upon the earth. In fact, three times the prophet Isaiah describes this as a day of vengeance. And we see most specifically these judgments appearing in the book of Revelation in a series, actually three series of seven: you have seven seal judgments; seven trumpet judgments; and then seven bowl judgments. And these judgments have undeniable parallels in the judgments predicted in the Old Testament and by Christ himself, especially in his Olivet Discourse and I might add that at the end of those judgments in Revelation, it's followed by a voice saying, "It is done."

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Discerning the Day of the Lord

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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3
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Now, all of these are preparatory for the establishment of the kingdom, that's why many times you will hear me call them the pre-kingdom judgments.

So if I can, you don't need to turn there, but just listen as I remind you of what the Lord has unveiled pertaining to these cataclysmic judgments that he will pour out upon the earth just prior to his return in Daniel's 70th week and this is basically found in Revelation chapters 6 through 19. I might add that this judgment will be so bad in those days that Jesus said in Matthew 24:22, "if they had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect, those days will be shortened."

So there are seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowl judgments. First of all, the seal judgments. The first one is the seal that is described as a white horse and it represents an unparalleled time in human history of world peace. Isn't that amazing? But it will be short-lived. We don't have time for me to describe all of the reasons for this but ultimately it will have to do with the destruction of the Islamic and Russian armies described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 and the antichrist signing a covenant with Israel. Israel will be kind of the top dog nation in the world at that point and everything will look wonderful. The believers are gone in the rapture, all of this chaos has happened and the Jews will be allowed to rebuild the Temple and on and on it goes. So first you have the first seal, the white horse of peace. And this is actually when antichrist ascends to power.

Secondly, there is the red horse of worldwide wars. This begins to escalate now. Millions die during this time. The third seal is the black horse of worldwide famine. So you see things are starting to get worse. Millions more die. Then the fourth seal is the ashen horse representing death. War, famine, disease. The Scriptures speak of the wild beasts that will undoubtedly speak primarily of the rodents that will bring about disease. Great earthquakes. Death is so widespread that the text tells us that a fourth of the earth will be left alive. By the fifth seal, which is the midpoint of the tribulation, many martyrs will die, Scripture says a great multitude no one can count. Then you have the sixth seal of cosmic disturbances. The Scriptures speak of a great earthquake, volcanoes, meteor showers. This will kill millions more. The seventh seal unleashes actually the first trumpet and that first trumpet is a judgment that destroys one third of the earth's vegetation. The second trumpet destroys one third of the sea and sea vessels and marine life. The third trumpet destroys one third of the world's freshwater supply. The fourth trumpet, there was the loss of light, the lowering of the earth's temperature and, of course, that will dramatically affect the weather patterns that will trigger widescale storms and hurricanes and tornadoes and this will bring about even more death and destruction. The fifth trumpet we read about, God will allow a scorpion like demonic horde to be released to torture unbelievers. They will pray to die but not be able to. The sixth trumpet, death

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Discerning the Day of the Lord

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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3
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will return with a vengeance. God will allow four unimaginably powerful demons to be released and they will basically command a 200 million army, number of army of creatures of judgment that will be ordered to "kill a third of mankind," and that's just a third of what's left.

We see by this time the inhabitants of the earth are reeling in ways that we cannot even begin to imagine from the seal and the trumpet judgments and this just takes us up to the first half of the tribulation. This is what Jesus calls the beginning of birth pains. We all know that when a woman is with child, eventually those pains become more frequent and more severe, so too the bowl judgments. The pain increases in severity and in rapidity in these final bowl judgments and I might also add that the bowl judgments actually recapitulate the plagues upon the Egyptians in Israel's first great deliverance. Now we're getting ready for Israel's second great deliverance.

Very quickly, the first bowl judgment speaks of loathsome and malignant sores that will come about upon the beast worshipers. Secondly, the seas turn to blood, everything in them dies. Thirdly, the same fate befalls all of the "freshwater rivers and springs." In the fourth bowl judgment, the sun scorches men with fierce heat, the text says and, "they blaspheme the name of God who has the power over these plagues and they did not repent so as to give him glory." Can you believe that? You would think by then people would say, "I give. I repent." No. The fifth bowl judgment, darkness encompasses the earth. The text says that men will gnaw their tongues because of pain and yet they will continue to blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores but they will not repent of their deeds. Then finally in the sixth bowl judgment the river Euphrates dries up allowing the kings of the East to assemble for "the war of the great day of God the Almighty." The text says that they will gather them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har Megeddon. Then the seventh bowl judgment will be the greatest earthquake the world has ever known. The text says "and every island fled away and the mountains were not found and huge hailstones about 100 pounds each came down from heaven upon men and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail because it's plague was extremely severe."

Now, it's amazing that despite God's repeated efforts to warn men of his wrath that is going to come, they continue to refuse to repent and reject him. We read about this in Revelation 6:15, "Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains." Folks, this is speaking of our leaders. This is speaking of our Congress, of all of our leaders and all of the leaders of the world that are so arrogant this day. The text goes on to say, "and they said to the mountains and to the

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Discerning the Day of the Lord

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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3
Preached on: Sunday, April 3, 2016

rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'" The point is no one.

This is almost identical to Joel 2:11 where the prophet writes, "The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, And who can endure it?" In Joel 2, beginning in verse 1 we read, "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, For the day of the LORD is coming; Surely it is near, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness." Verse 10, "there has never been anything like it nor where there ever be again after it." The earthquakes and the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness. In verse 30 and following, he says, "I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, Blood, fire and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood Before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD and Will be delivered; For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem There will be those who escape, As the LORD has said, Even among the survivors whom the LORD calls."

Now, if I can pause for a moment, a very important footnote, we want to be good Bible students here: the Old Testament prophecies concerning the day of the Lord are examples of what we call prophetic foreshortening. This is the idea that the prophets are looking ahead and they are often envisioning two advents of Christ as two mountain peaks with a valley in between. They can see one peak in the foreground and another peak in the background but they have no idea as to how much time is going to intervene in between or what's going to happen in between. So the historical days of the Lord that the prophets envision, those judgments that would soon come upon the people that we can now look back upon and see as events of ancient history, all of those were also previews of a final eschatological Day of the Lord that some of the Thessalonians thought they were living in because of persecution.

Zephaniah warned Judah of the Day of the Lord that would soon come at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar that also pointed to a much greater Day of the Lord that would come when the Lord returns. In Zephaniah 3 we read this, beginning in verse 8, by the way, this is also a wonderful testimony of God's grace upon his covenant people Israel. He says, "'Therefore wait for Me,' declares the LORD, 'For the day when I rise up as a witness. Indeed, My decision is to gather nations, To assemble kingdoms, To pour out on them My indignation, All My burning anger; For all the earth will be devoured By the fire of My zeal. For then I will give to the peoples purified lips, That all of them may call on the name of the LORD, To serve Him shoulder to shoulder. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, My dispersed ones, Will bring My offerings. In that day you

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Discerning the Day of the Lord

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3
Preached on: Sunday, April 3, 2016

will feel no shame Because of all your deeds By which you have rebelled against Me; For then I will remove from your midst Your proud, exulting ones, And you will never again be haughty On My holy mountain. But I will leave among you A humble and lowly people, And they will take refuge in the name of the LORD. The remnant of Israel will do no wrong And tell no lies, Nor will a deceitful tongue Be found in their mouths; For they will feed and lie down With no one to make them tremble.' Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away His judgments against you, He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; You will fear disaster no more. In that day it will be said to Jerusalem: 'Do not be afraid, O Zion; Do not let your hands fall limp. The LORD your God is in your midst, A victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy. I will gather those who grieve about the appointed feasts - They came from you, O Zion; The reproach of exile is a burden on them. Behold, I am going to deal at that time With all your oppressors, I will save the lame And gather the outcast, And I will turn their shame into praise and renown In all the earth. At that time I will bring you in, Even at the time when I gather you together; Indeed, I will give you renown and praise Among all the peoples of the earth, When I restore your fortunes before your eyes,' Says the LORD."

The closing verses of Malachi's prophecy likewise summarize the coming day of the Lord and there he foretells of the ominous day, that great, he calls it, and dreadful Day of the Lord. Folks this is where history is headed. Let me read to you what Malachi says, "'Behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,' says the LORD of hosts, 'so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings,'" this is a reference to the Messiah, "'and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.'" This is depicting the sheer joy of millennial blessing. "'You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,' says the LORD of hosts. 'Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.'" It's interesting, even as John the Baptist was an Elijah like person at Christ's first coming, there is going to be another Elijah like preacher of reconciliation just prior to his second coming. Malachi goes on and gives us the words of the Lord where he says, "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers." You see, this was a uniting that didn't occur at Christ's first coming, right? Then he concludes and says, "so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

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In his Olivet Discourse Jesus said this in Luke 21, "there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven." Verse 25 he says, "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken." And Peter reminds us of this day in his first sermon that he preached recorded in Acts 2, beginning in verse 19, where he quotes from the prophet Joel, "And I will grant wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come. And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Oh, dear Christian, what a foretaste of hell this is for the unbelieving and, frankly, it will be just a sample of their eternal destiny unless they repent and how I hope and pray that you truly know Christ. But dear Christian, aren't you thankful, aren't you comforted by the fact that we're not destined for this. We will be raptured before this incomprehensible season of divine wrath.

So Paul concludes in verse 3, "then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape." Literally, no unbeliever will survive. Oh, what dreadful finality there is in this phrase. No unbeliever will survive this, only believers will populate the kingdom initially. And folks, I hope you come away from hearing all of this this morning not being discouraged and afraid. That is certainly not the purpose of these texts, but rather to be exhilarated with some great truths. Here's what I want you to come away with: I want you to be reminded afresh that God hates sin and he will judge it and aren't you thankful that it has been judged on our behalf by the Lord Jesus Christ? The second thing that you must come away with is: you simply must be prepared. Those of you who may think you know Christ but you know in your heart it's just a sham, it is time you get serious about your Christianity. And dear Christian, those of you that know and love the Lord, may I exhort you to look upon your children with mercy and with love and get serious about giving them the Gospel that they might be saved. Let them see your love for Christ and let them see your burden for the lost lest you perpetuate the apathy that is so consistent with so many believers today; lest you continue to mitigate both the seriousness and the consequences of sin, not to mention mitigate the glorious power of the Gospel. Hear all of these things and get serious about your faith. Let your mind dwell on the things above, not on the things of this earth. Judgment is coming, so is our glorious Lord and Savior. Won't that be something to see him finally face-to-face? Oh, what hope we have in Christ.

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Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these eternal truths. They sober us and we need to be sobered because we live in such a Pollyanna world; we live in a world that is so ridiculous; we live in cyberspace, walking around with our little machines. Lord, I pray that each one of us will be sobered enough to really get serious about our walk with you and to live consistently with the glorious truths of the Gospel that you might be glorified in our lives and the lives of our children, the lives of our family and our church. Lord, may we be a second coming people. I pray for anyone that does not know you, Lord, only you can cause them to be born again. We have sown the seed yet again today, we trust you to germinate that seed and bring them to faith and repentance. For it is in Christ's name that I pray. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You've been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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