**1 Thessalonians 5:3**

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**Signs of the Coming Day of the Lord**

***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 labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.***

* In my message last Sunday we examined verses 1 & 2 of chapter 5, in which Paul reminds the Thessalonian brethren that he had previously taught them that ***the day of the Lord*** would be an event that would ***come just like a thief in the night*** . . . suddenly and unexpectedly.
* But while ***the day of the Lord*** will be an event that occurs suddenly and unexpectedly, **it will not be without warning or signs preceding it.**
  + In fact, **unlike the Rapture of the church, which will be precede by no signs**,we learn in the Bible that **there will be specific signs preceding** ***the day of the Lord***.
* So, having explained to you what ***the day of the Lord*** is last Sunday, today I want to teach you what Scripture reveals about **the signs that precede *the day of the Lord.***
* It is interesting to notice that while there are many signs of the coming of ***the day of the Lord*** in Scripture, Paul focuses on a single sign here in his first letter to the Thessalonians. He says in v. 3 . . . ***While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them . . .***

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* One of the important steps in Bible interpretation is understanding **who is speaking and who is being spoken about** in any particular passage.
  + And one of the common interpretive problems is discerning who the pronouns in a passage are referring to.
  + We have one of those interpretive problems here in v. 3. When Paul says ***while they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them***, who do the pronouns ***they*** and ***them*** refer to?
* I believe we find the answer in the following verse, when Paul says, ***But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief***.
  + In v. 3-4 Paul is comparing the condition of ***they*** who are ***saying “peace and safety”*** with ***you, brethren*** who are not ***in darkness***.
* Based upon Paul’s comparison, I believe that ***they*** and ***them*** that Paul refers to in v. 3 is **the unbelieving world.**
  + It appears, from the context of the passage, that Paul is comparing the actions and attitudes of unbelievers in v. 3, compared to the condition and attitudes of believers in v. 4.

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**“Peace and Safety!”**

***1 Thessalonians 5:3— While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them . . .***

* In regard to the attitudes and actions of the unbelieving world at the time ***the day of the Lord*** begins, Paul characterizes it, in v. 3, as an oblivious attitude of ***“peace and safety.”***
* What does the phrase ***peace and safety*** mean?
  + The term ***peace*** points to the circumstances that do not evoke any feeling of alarm, while the term ***safety*** carries the attitude of security from danger.
  + ***Peace and safety*** **are two of the primary needs and desires of all men.** Beyond the physiological needs of food and shelter, ***peace and safety*** are the conditions in which we most desire.
  + And, unfortunately, when ***the day of the Lord*** begins, the world will have been lulled into a false sense of security and will be totally surprised and overwhelmed by the events that then overtake them.
* The false sense of security that the world rests under when ***the day of the Lord*** comes upon them is described by the Lord, Himself, in Matthew 24 and Luke 17. Luke 17 provides a more comprehensive picture . . .

***Luke 17:26-30— 26 "And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: 27 they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. 28 It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; 29 but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. 30 It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.***

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* + Notice in both the examples of ***the days of Noah*** and ***the days of Lot*** that mankind was in a time of supposed ***peace and safety*** as they lived their lives, ***eating & drinking, buying & selling, planting & building, and marrying & giving in marriage***.
    - In other words, they were living their ungodly lives, totally oblivious and unsuspecting of what was about to happen to them. Then ***fire and brimstone from heaven destroyed Sodom*** and ***the flood came*** anddestroyed the earth.
    - But until the moment of their destruction, they falsely believed that they were living in ***peace and safety***.
  + In Luke 17 the Lord then makes His point that ***so will the coming of the Son of Man be.***
    - That is the point that Paul is drawing our attention to in 1 Thessalonians 5:3 . . . ***While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them.***
* Then, to emphasize the nature of the catastrophe that comes upon the unsuspecting and unbelieving world, Paul adds in v. 3 . . . ***destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.***

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* + Here in v. 3 the term ***destruction*** (Gr. *olethros*—#3639) carries the meaning of “utter and hopeless ruin.”
    - But it is important to note that the word ***destruction*** does **not** denote the loss of **being**, but the loss of **well-**being.
    - In other words, their destruction does not result in the immediate loss of their lives, but the immediate ***destruction*** of their supposed ***peace and safety*** . . . which are replaced by devastation and ruin.

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* And because they are oblivious to the warnings of Scripture and are carrying on without a worry in the world, Paul describes how this ***destruction*** comes upon them . . . ***like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.***
  + The use of the example of ***labor pains upon a woman*** denotes not only the pain that accompanies ***labor***, but the inevitability of the pain. Once a woman has begun to labor in childbirth, there is nothing that can stop it. The pain will only end when the labor is ended and the child is delivered.
  + While childbirth in developed countries is much safer than it used to be, it is still a dangerous process that often can have a tragic outcome. Even today, women often die during childbirth, because even when something is going terribly wrong, the labor cannot be stopped until the process is complete.
* And, to emphasize the totality of the destruction that comes upon mankind in ***the day of the Lord,*** Paul adds in v. 3 . . . ***they will not escape***. The subjects of God’s coming judgment will not be able to find any refuge or relief from God’s wrath.

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* + Like a woman in labor, the pain will continue without relief until God’s wrath is fully revealed.
  + And though it is not translated in our English versions, Paul uses **a strong double negative** to emphasize the inevitability of this destruction. The Greek construction of v. 3 states ***there is no escape, none!***
  + So will be the events of ***the day of the Lord***. Once they have begun, there is no power on earth that can stop them until they have run their unstoppable and divinely-ordered course.

**The Event that Begins The Day of the Lord**

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* It is interesting that, unlike the Lord’s description in Luke 17, Paul’s warning of the attitude of mankind in the days prior to the coming of ***the day of the Lord*** in v. 3 is simply the world’s false sense of ***peace and safety***.
  + But I submit to you that this false sense of ***peace and safety*** does not describe the attitudes prior to ***the day of the Lord***, but is actually the **first event of** ***the day of the Lord.*** Notice in 1 Thessalonians 5:3 that it is ***while they are saying "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them***.

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**Events that precede *the day of the Lord***

* As I have said several times during our study of 1 Thessalonians, the event known as **the Rapture of the Church** is an imminent, “sign-less event.” That means that there is nothing that warns of its coming and there is nothing that is required to precede it. It can happen at any time. And it has been looked for and anticipated by believers for the past 2000 years.
  + But while the Rapture is a sign-less and imminent event, ***the day of the Lord*****is an event that is preceded by signs.** We see **2 major signs listed by Paul in his second letter to the Thessalonians . . .**

***2 Thessalonians 2:1-3— 1 Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, 2 that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction***

* I want to take a few minutes to talk about the two signs Paul speaks of here in v. 3 . . . ***the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed***.

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**The First Sign of *the day of the Lord— the apostasia***

* I have always been taught and understood that ***the apostasy*** was a reference to **“the widespread defection from faith” . . . the fact that in the times preceding *the day of the Lord* the professing church would experience a dramatic and devastating spiritual falling away of a multitude of professing Christians.**
  + But thanks to some recent scholarship provided to me by Eric Howard, I have changed my view on the meaning of the Greek word *apostasia*.
  + The only other use of this compound Greek word . . . *apostasia* . . . is found in Acts 21:21, when the elders of the church in Jerusalem tell Paul that he is being accused by unbelievers of encouraging Jews to ***forsake*** the teaching of Moses. In this instance the word ***forsake*** is the word *apostasia*.
* The Greek word *apostasia* is a compound of *apo*, meaning "from," and *histemi*, meaning "to stand." Thus, the core meaning of *apostasia* is "away from" or "departure."

* + The Liddell and Scott Greek Lexicon defines *apostasia* first as "defection, revolt;" then secondly as "departure, disappearance.” Thus the meaning can refer either to a **spiritual or a physical, spatial “departure.”**
  + But while the compound word, *apostasia*, is used only twice in the New Testament, the root word, *histemi*, is used15 times in the New Testament. Of the 15 uses of *histemi*, 12 uses are in references are to a **spatial or physical departure**.
* So, if the Greek word is a reference to a **spatial or physical departure, this would be a strong argument that the *apostasia* of v. 3 is not a spiritual departure from faith, but a reference to a pre-tribulational departure of the church**, referred to by Paul in v. 1 as ***the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him***.
* In addition, here in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 Paul uses **the definite article, “the,” in reference to “the *apostasia.”***
  + In the Greek language the use of the definite article is used to mean “a specific event” . . . “the one and only.” As Dr. Tommy Ice writes, *“the apostle Paul refers here to a definite event which he calls "the departure," and which will occur just before the start of the tribulation. This is the rapture of the church.”*
* Some people will inevitably object that this interpretation of the word *apostasia* as a reference to **“the departure” of the church at the rapture**is contrary to the way it has been interpreted for the past 350 years.
  + And that objection would be valid. But to this objection I would then respond by pointing to the fact that **all 7 English translations of the New Testament prior to the King James Version translated the word “apostasia” as “departure,” not *apostasy***. The King James Version was the first English translation to use the word ***apostasy***.
  + The reason for this translation change is unknown, but it has been translated ***apostasy*** ever since.
* For the reasons I just outlined, I believe that the translation of *apostasia* is more correctly translated ***departure*** and is a reference to ***the physical departure* of the church at the rapture.**

**The second sign of the coming of the day of the Lord**

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***2 Thessalonians 2:3— Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction***

* Then, reading on in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, after the rapture of the church, Paul gives the second sign of ***the day of the Lord’s* arrival** . . . ***and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction***.
* A few minutes ago I explained the significance of **the definite article in the Greek language**. It is used to indicate **a specific event or person.** Just as ***the day of the Lord*** refers to a specific event, and ***the apostasia*** refers to a specific event, so to, the term ***the man of lawlessness*** is a reference to a specific person.
  + And furthermore, ***the man of lawlessness*** is further described by Paul as ***the son of destruction***.
* This specific man that Paul is referring to . . . ***the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction*** . . . is none other than **the Antichrist** . . . ***the beast*** of the book of Revelation.
  + ***The man of lawlessness*** is Satan’s man . . . a man who will emerge on the world scene and usher in ***the day of the Lord.***

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**How the Antichrist ushers in *the day of the Lord***

* The question we then ask is, “how does the Antichrist usher in ***the day of the Lord***?”
  + The answer to this question is found in the book of Revelation.
* In Revelation 5 we have a scene in heaven. We see God seated on His throne, holding a scroll . . .

***Revelation 5:1-2— 1 I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. 2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?"***

* The answer to this question is found in v. 5 . . .

***Revelation 5:5— “. . . behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals."***

* The scroll that God is holding is a valuable document.
  + Normally an important scroll would have been sealed with one or two wax seals. The purpose of the seals was to ensure the document had not been opened or tampered with. The fact that this document has 7 seals attests to its great importance.
* And what is this document?
  + The document God is holding is the title deed to the earth. It is proof of God’s rightful claim to the earth and His right to rule the earth.
  + After the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden, God permitted Satan a limited rule over the earth, for a time. But with the opening of the scroll God is asserting His ownership over the earth and His right to evict Satan and evil from the earth.
* So, because Jesus has conquered sin and death on the cross, He is worthy to open the scroll and assert His ownership and authority over the earth and all living things.
  + And we see Jesus begin the process of breaking the seals on the scroll, beginning in Revelation 6:1 . . .

***Revelation 6:1-2— 1 Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come."***

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***2  I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.***

* Here in Revelation 6:2 we see the first of four horsemen revealed in the breaking of the first 4 seals.
  + Notice how this first horseman, **the rider on the *white horse***,is described . . . ***he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.***
  + This rider is seen having ***a bow***, but no arrows are seen or shot. And then we learn that ***a crown was given to him***, meaning this is a peaceful attainment of power . . . he does not have to fight to attain power, but he is granted a position of great authority.
  + In the phrase ***he went out conquering and to conquer*** indicates that after being given his initial position of authority, he extends his authority and power by conquest.
* I believe that this rider on ***the white horse*** is ***the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction***.
  + While he comes to power peacefully, perhaps being hailed as a hero for averting some world-wide calamity or crisis. In fact, I believe we are given a hint regarding the event that leads to the Antichrist’s rise to power. In Daniel 9:27 we read . . .

***Daniel 9:27— "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."***

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* + We learn in the book of Daniel that ***a week*** is a reference to **“a week of years”** . . . **7 years.**
  + In Daniel 9:26 we see the reference to ***the prince who is to come***, followed immediately in v. 27 by the pronoun ***he***. Grammatically, it appears that ***the prince who is to come*** is ***he*** who ***will make a firm covenant*** with the Jews for 7 years . . . **a 7 year peace agreement.**
  + We are not told what world events precipitate the making of this peace agreement with the Jewish people, only that a covenant is made that is later broken.
* Having made this peace covenant, this man will break the covenant after 3 ½ years and commit ***the abomination of desolation*** by desecrating the Jewish temple, as described in Daniel and Revelation.
  + We also see this event of ***the abomination of desolation*** of the Antichrist taught by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 . . .

***2 Thessalonians 2:3-4— 3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the departure comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.***

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* + The event of **“taking *his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God”*** **is** the **abomination of desolation.**
  + So, the events in Daniel 9:27 and 2 Thessalonians 2:4 appear to be the same event. And if this is true, then this affirms that it is the Antichrist who signs the 7 year covenant of peace with the Jews prior to this event.
* As we learn in the book of Revelation, after rising to power the Antichrist slowly begins to reveal who he is as he consolidates his power . . . He is ***the man of lawlessness,*** ***the son of destruction*** . . . and he rules over the earth with greater and greater evil and cruelty.

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* So, here in 1 Thessalonians 5:3 we learn the unbelieving world will be taken totally by surprise when ***the day of the Lord*** suddenly comes upon them, leading to their utter ruin.
  + And furthermore, we learn in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 that ***the day of the Lord*** will be preceded by **2 specific signs . . . the rapture of the church and the revealing of *the man of lawlessness* . . . the Antichrist.**
  + **And it is this second sign, the revealing of *the man of lawlessness*, that is actually the event that signals the beginning of *the day of the Lord.***
* Now, if you hold to a pre-tribulational view of the rapture of the church, you understand that according to the timeline I’ve laid out, the church will not be present when **the Antichrist is fully revealed.**
  + However, this does not mean that the church will not see this man’s ascent to power.
  + It is very likely that prior to the rapture of the church those who are observant will see ***the man of lawlessness*** beginning to emerge as a world leader.
* But I caution you. A very popular game that some Christians love to play is “pin the tail on the Antichrist.”
  + Over the centuries Christians in every generation have engaged in speculation regarding the identity of the Antichrist. In the past two generations we have seen a great many candidates for the Antichrist. During WWII many people believed that Hitler was the Antichrist because of what He did to God’s chosen people. He certainly was **a man of lawlessness,** but he was not ***the man of lawlessness***.
  + During the Gulf War, in the early 1990s many people thought that Saddam Hussein was the Antichrist. He, too, was **a man of lawlessness**, but was not ***the man of lawlessness.***
  + Men such as Hitler and Stalin and Napoleon and Mao and Saddam Hussein were certainly examples of the kind of man that **the Antichrist** will be. But ***the man of lawlessness*** prophesied in Scripture will surpass even those barbaric and evil men on the scale of evil that he will perpetrate upon the world.
* It is a very popular game among some Christians who study prophecy to try to see which modern despotic ruler might be ***the man of lawlessness***.
  + But we should try to avoid such foolish and useless speculation. Instead, our time is much better spent telling others about Jesus and exhorting one another to godliness.
* As a person who believes in the pretribulational rapture, I find Paul’s instruction in 1 & 2 Thessalonians in regard to the events surrounding the rapture to be interesting and encouraging.
  + They are interesting because Paul’s teaching gives us a small degree of insight into the events leading up to ***the day of the Lord***.
  + But, at the same time, I find Paul’s teaching encouraging because **if my belief in the timing of the pretribulational rapture is correct, we won’t be here to see or suffer the world-wide calamity and affliction the world will suffer.**
  + That is why Paul wrote what he did in 2 Thessalonians 2 . . . to calm the nerves of those who had been deceived by the false teaching that they had missed the rapture and were now in ***the day of the Lord***. Paul writes . . .

***2 Thessalonians 2:1-3— 1 Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, 2 that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the departure comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,***

* + Knowing these things, my goal is . . . as Paul exhorts his readers in 1 Thessalonians 4:18… ***Therefore comfort one another with these words.*** I hope you do find comfort in the teaching this morning.