

Armor Up

Sunday School Lesson

I Thessalonians 5

February 15, 2026

In 2025, more than \$3.3 million was wagered on a single question: "Will Jesus Christ Return in 2025?" This was a real market, with real money at stake. People placed wagers through Polymarket, one of the world's largest prediction market platforms. When January 1, 2026 passed without Jesus appearing, those who bet "No" collected their winnings, earning returns that rivaled many traditional low risk investments. The same question has since been relisted for 2027, and bets are already being placed.

The Left Behind book series sold over 80 million copies worldwide and while the ultimate profit amount has been kept quiet, we do know that the publisher, Tyndale, was able to put \$50 million into their endowment from its profits. The believers at Thessalonica are not the only ones worried about the return of Jesus.

Julia Ward Howe included a reference to Thessalonians in her beloved "Battle Hymn of the Republic" in the line referring to "the Lord coming with trumpets sounding forth." The fourth and fifth chapters of First Thessalonians is filled with apocalyptic imagery. For those of us growing up in evangelical revivals, we can tell you about the preacher terrifying his listeners with imagery from the world ending.

But for the Apostle Paul, there was nothing scary about Jesus' return. Paul reframes the conversation to be a vision of hope. This was an event of restoration, of gathering with the saints of present and the past, and most of all, a day when suffering ended for those who believed. While the evangelical moment may have used the imagery to scare us into heaven, black culture has viewed the second coming with anticipation because on that day, all wrongs will be made right.

Purpose Statement: To consider the armor Paul described and our willingness to put it on.

Our lesson today focuses on 1 Thessalonians 5:5-8:

All of you are children of light and children of the day. We don't belong to night or darkness. So then, let's not sleep like the others, but let's stay awake and stay sober. People who sleep sleep at night, and people who get drunk get drunk at night. Since we belong to the day, let's stay sober, wearing faithfulness and love as a piece of armor that protects our body and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

In the Message, Eugene Peterson interprets 5-8 this way:

You're sons of Light, daughters of Day. We live under wide open skies and know where we stand. So let's not sleepwalk through life like those others. Let's keep our eyes open and be smart. People sleep at night and get drunk at night. But not us! Since we're creatures of Day, let's act like it. Walk out into the daylight sober, dressed up in faith, love, and the hope of salvation.

Like a good mentor or teacher, Paul is reframing the confusion over end times by reminding the Christians at Thessalonica that they are already prepared to see Jesus again. They have already experienced the love of Jesus, they have already left the darkness to become children of the light, and they are already wearing the armor of faith that will protect them. This is an important message for this small group of Christians who felt alienated from their former friends and relatives for their faith in Christ. Once we have a relationship to God through Jesus Christ, we need not be afraid. God will never sever that tie although we may choose at some point to walk away and take off that protective armor. Paul is hoping we do not!

This is good news for us especially when there is so much in the world that seems uncertain at present. This is good news for us even when we hear other Christians who believe differently try to make us afraid. This is good news for us because most of us have already experienced dark days at some point in our lives and we know from experience that God is with us – in our grief, in our suffering, in our losses, and in our humanity. God is also with us in our celebrations and in our joy.

Encouragement

Let's take a look at the encouragement Paul gives this young church:

- Live in peace with one another.
- Comfort the discouraged.
- Help the weak.
- Be patient with everyone.
- Always pursue the good for each other and everyone else.
- Rejoice always.
- Pray continually.
- Give thanks in every situation.
- Do not suppress the spirit.
- Examine everything carefully and hold on to what is good.
- Avoid every kind of evil.

Friends, this should be the character of every church that calls itself the body of Christ. This is what we should strive to do and to be. It is so easy to criticize but we learn nothing in our criticism. Instead, we should be curious.

Now maybe we should ask, "Can we really rejoice always?" As humans who hurt and who struggle through loss, this is a difficult reality to imagine. I do believe we can rejoice that God is with us and will never abandon us in our pain. One of the reasons I am a United Methodist is that I do not believe intentionally inflicts pain on us. I could never worship a God who gives a child cancer. I could not love a God who would send a drunk driver to kill someone I love. We are humans in fragile bodies and there are consequences to the dangerous decisions made by others and sometimes, made by us. God does not provide all things but God provides in all things.

Let us pray:

Loving God, help us put on the protective armor you have already provided. Help us to live in faith day by day. Amen.