

Living the Story

A Study through Scripture

Introduction:

I am curious as to the date of the first prediction of the end of the world. Who was the first one to wear a sandwich board and walk the streets pronouncing coming disaster?

Perhaps someone has researched this—I have not—but I do know that as early as the time of Jesus, people were discussing the end times. In Christian circles, that has an added dimension: When will Jesus come back to begin his reign?

On the one hand, we tend to ignore such dire predictions. People who lived in the time of Jesus may have expected him to return within months or years, but two-thousand years removed from that, we tend to assume it will happen but not in the near future. Yet, even as we say such things, we occasionally do cast a wary eye toward impending “days of disaster.” Any of you make preparations for Y2K? Did you think about the Mayan calendar and ask: What if?

Jesus makes certain we know that no one, not even him, knows the end of time. He does, however, tell us we need to be ready. The issue is not when he will come back, but will we be looking for his return.

Summary of the Text:

Paul begins this passage in Thessalonians reminding the readers that he (or some other teacher) has already instructed them that time for the return of Jesus is and will be unknown. It will happen, just like a pregnant woman will experience labor pains when she delivers, but no one knows when.

Paul’s words naturally lend themselves to reflection on their implications, so Paul continues with those implications: since the end will come like a thief in the night, that is, unexpectedly, be awake and sober. In other words, even though the end will be a surprise, live in such a way that it comes as no surprise. Do not be caught off guard by this.

Paul continues by instructing the Thessalonians to put on faith, love, and hope. There are echoes here of both 1 Corinthians 13, as well as the armor of God passage found in Ephesians 6. The idea here is that we are to be dressed as if we are ready for battle. We are appointed to receive salvation, but must live like that.

Finally, notice the instruction he leaves these people: encourage one another. The idea of encouraging is used repeatedly in the book of 1 Thessalonians (11 times – the NIV at times translates the word “urge”) as both an admonition from Paul to these people, but also an instruction for how they are to live amongst one another. Encouragement in the face of impending disaster or even possible doom is vital for us to continue facing that doom and these people are no different.

Preparing for the Group Time:

I think the obvious question for us to reflect on as group leaders is: Do we live lives that indicate we are prepared for the return of Christ? Are we either fearful or flippant? Or are we watchful, understanding that Christ’s return could happen at any moment?

LESSON #35

Date: 5/19/2013

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5.1-11

The Story: Chapter 31

The Big Picture: The end is near! In what ways do you live in fear of this statement? In what ways do you live this statement as a reality in your life?

Materials Needed: none

Living the Story

Lesson #35

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5.1-11

Lesson Outline:

A few years ago, the world went through this big “crisis” called Y2K. No one knew what would happen when we changed the calendar in our computer systems from '99 to 2000. Have your group describe what they remember about that day. What specific actions, if any, did they take in preparation for that day? [NOTE: A more recent event was the end of the Mayan calendar on December 21, 2012. What reaction did you see in people and how seriously did they take it?]

Ask discussion questions.

Close in prayer.

Discussion Questions:

People (perhaps not everyone, but certainly groups of people) always seem to be preparing for a cataclysmic end to the world. Why do you think that is the case?

Why do you think the moment of the end of time is so important to people? How often do you think about it?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5.1-11.

Why do you think the Thessalonians were so interested in the end of the world? Do you think they were more concerned or less concerned than some of the groups we see today?

In what ways is asking the date and time of the end of the world the wrong question? How do you think Paul would respond to this question?

Give examples of what you think it means to “be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet” (5.8).

How can you encourage one another and build up one another in light of the knowledge you have about the second coming of Christ?

Living the Story:

This week, commit to living each moment of each day in such a way that it prepares you for the coming of Christ. Also, not only do this for yourself, but also commit to encouraging one another in your group to do the same.

Prayer Time:

1 Thessalonians 3.11-13 would make a good prayer to close your group time this week.

Next Week:

Next week will be the last week of *The Story*. The texts for this are: Romans 12-15, Galatians 5-6, Philippians 3-4, and Ephesians 4-6.