

Living Together with God ¹

✦ **Watchful in God's peace** (vv.1-6)

✦ **Encouraging one another** (vv.7-11)

In the Name of Jesus the object of our faith, love, and hope, dearly redeemed children of God:

This TIME IN BETWEEN Christ's first and second coming, should we listen? Modern American culture, for all its religiosity, has no use for Jesus telling His Church to "Keep watch!" Why worry if most preachers claim there is no hell; God would never damn anyone. They reject Jesus' warning: ***"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."*** (Mark 16:16)

How is the average person supposed to know who to listen to? Could Jesus be trusted when He said He would suffer and die for the sins of the world? Only if He did. That He would rise from the dead? Only if He did. That Jerusalem would be destroyed? Only if it was. That's why I believe Jesus. Everything He said, even the worst of suffering in His soul under the wrath of God (Isaiah 53), it all came true! Likewise, the apostles Jesus sent. Paul gained nothing from founding churches, such as the one in Thessalonica, nothing but persecution, imprisonment, and finally death for Jesus' sake. And what was the simple message that messed up the critics of Christ and His apostles? One sentence Jesus kept pounding from the beginning of His ministry: ***"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."*** (Matthew 3:2; 4:17)

"But it hasn't happened!" the critics cry. "Nearer now than ever," responds Christ's Church. "Wake! Awake! For night is flying. The watchmen on the heights are crying. Awake, Jerusalem, arise!" Now is the time to be **Living Together with God**. This TIME IN BETWEEN we are...

✦ **Watchful in God's peace** (vv.1-6)

"Concerning the times and dates, brothers, there is no need to write to you, for you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When people are saying, "Peace and security," destruction will suddenly come on them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will certainly not escape." (1-3 EHV)

The 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918, was supposed to bring an end to war. The League of Nations would ensure that the bloodshed would not be repeated after "the War to End All Wars." One of my Seminary professors, Dr. Becker, told us his college roommate argued that the Bible must be wrong because, "streets can't burn," the way the Bible said, ***"The elements shall melt with fervent heat."*** (2 Peter 3:12 KJV) As our 1984 Senior class listened, Dr. Becker wondered aloud what his former roommate thought with the firebombing of Dresden, Germany, in the Second World War, as the streets burned. Doesn't the Bible keep proving itself by the continuous ***"wars and rumors of wars"***? (Matthew 24:6)

God's goal here is not to cause distress, but help us be **Watchful in God's peace**. ***"But you, brothers, are not in the dark so that this day takes you by surprise like a thief, for you are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness. So then let us not sleep like everyone else, but rather let us remain alert and sober."*** (4-6)

We ***remain alert and sober*** in our thinking during today's gender dysphoria by appreciating our Creator's love making human's male and female (Genesis 1:27), then giving us all equal status, equal love, close caring partnership by saying, ***"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷ for all of***

¹ 2023 WELS Worship Foundations series: *THE TIME IN BETWEEN: A Time for Watchfulness*.

you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” (Galatians 3:26-28 NIV84) Our different responsibilities as we are **Watchful in God’s peace** can be carried out with joy and satisfaction because we are awake spiritually, eagerly awaiting the full brilliance of the eternal Day in heaven’s glory with Jesus.

The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and on those dwelling in the region and the shadow of death a light has dawned. (Matthew 4:16) The **light** of Jesus the Savior of the world brings joy and peace beyond any harvest or payday. This is the joy of sins-forgiven, of eternal peace with God, the triumph of all believers in God’s great vindication of the Last Day. Jesus has promised that all who oppress and persecute Christians will finally suffer eternal defeat with Satan whom they chose instead of God’s Son. To be on the right side of history means following the one who writes His-Story in truth. It means **Living Together with God**, while enjoying the peace that surpasses all understanding, while...

✦ Encouraging one another (vv.7-11)

So what are you supposed to think if you’re surfing the web and keep finding folks who hate Christians, hate God and despise the Bible? Maybe you’re angry at “Christians” not acting like Christ. Are they spiritually inebriated? Sound asleep? Dressed in their own virtue signaling and intolerant immorality?

“To be sure, those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. You see, God did not appoint us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as you are also doing.” (7–11)

We can illustrate with the *faith* of the Canaanite woman who is a fine example of how we can **“take up the shield of faith.”** (Ephesians 6:16) Jesus’ disciples wanted Him to get rid of her. They didn’t care that her daughter was demon-possessed. Was Jesus heartless going along with His disciples? But her *faith* in God’s grace and goodness shielded her from walking away offended. Her *faith* shielded her from spiritual fatigue that would have given up too soon. She answered one of Jesus’ seemingly unkind comments by praying again, **“Lord, help me!”** *He answered her, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to their little dogs.”* **“Yes, Lord,”** she said, **“yet their little dogs also eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”** *Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, your faith is great! It will be done for you, just as you desire.”* *And her daughter was healed at that very hour.*” (Matthew 15:26–28 EHV)

That’s how *faith and love* shield like body armor, how *hope* protects like a helmet from everything the devil and this world and your own troubled conscience can throw at you. God’s Word is so solid that it strengthens you right where you hurt, with encouragement that pulls you out of despair. Picture this: If your car is teetering on the edge of a cliff, rescuers look for somewhere to attach a cable to winch your car to safety. Today’s bumpers would pull right off, but if your car has a trailer hitch, there’s a secure connection to the body for a safe rescue. A rescuer might say, “Your trailer hitch saved you.” But really it just received the power on the other end of the cable winch. Faith receives God’s power in the Gospel.

Faith keeps **Living Together with God** in this TIME IN BETWEEN as it connects to Christ suffering God wrath in you place. *Love* from God connects your heart and life. *Hope* helps us **encourage one another and build each other up** in something as simple as standing in line for fellowship and donuts after worship. It doesn’t have to be a big deal for most of what we can share at such times.

But what if you need more, maybe even more than your pastors can give? I’m convinced God’s Word is so powerful that it reaches to the depths of your soul and spirit to heal you. But we pastors are trained as general practitioners. If your car, so to speak, plunged into a lake of PTSD or past traumas, you might need trained, experienced divers to swim through the murky waters to that trailer hitch for your soul. That’s what faithful counselors offer at Christian Family Solutions. When troubles go deep, we’ll be there together to hook up with faith and help you out. **Healing & Helping, Living Together with God.** Amen.

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