

Sleepy Faith

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

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Once upon a time there was a little boy and his bear. The little boy had to go to school, so he wrote his bear a letter. In it he said to the bear, "Always remember you are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think and loved more than you could possibly know." The boy tucked the letter underneath the sleeping bear so the bear would find it when he awoke. And he did find it when he woke up, but he had a terrible time reading it. So, he went to his friends. The other stuffed friends finally helped him learn what it said, they read it aloud, "Bear, I am heading off to school. Remember you are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, smarter than you think and loved more than you could possibly know." Now everything should have been easy and fine, however when they read school, they pronounced it as skull and convinced themselves that the boy actually needed saving. Through many misadventures of travelling through woods and caves they finally did meet the boy, who had been at school and returned, and not at the skull captured by pirates or other scary characters. And they all lived happily ever after.

Have you heard that one before? It is one of the many tales of Christopher Robin and Winnie the Pooh. It means a lot to me today, because the letter that the boy writes the bear reminds me of the letter that we read from Paul today to the Thessalonians.

I wonder, what do you think of this story. "Once upon a time everyone in the house was sleeping soundly, when, all of a sudden, a thief came in and stole all of the families' things. They would have been able to scare off the thief, but they had been sleeping and so they lost everything. The end.

Would you consider this a happy story? **Would you think it was an uplifting story or a scary story? Would you be reassured or on edge?** Surprisingly enough, the story is meant to reassure and not frighten. Paul writes to the Thessalonians saying, "Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. Paul adds, "When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief;"

Hear that? Paul writes to the Thessalonians to tell them that because of their faith, they will not be surprised when Jesus comes like a thief in the night. Now we know that Jesus lived, Jesus died, Jesus was resurrected, and we live in the hope and assurance that one day we will meet Jesus again.

In these stories, it is important to realize that Paul is suggesting that the thief in the night is Jesus coming to take us home. It is another of Jesus' great turnarounds. You know...the big ideas Jesus has about "the last shall be first and the first shall be last..." This scripture is full of reminders that we should live our lives ready to meet Jesus again. We should be ready for the thief in the night who is Jesus our Lord.

Here is a question for you, **are you ready to meet Jesus? How do you feel about this possibility?**

Jurgen Moltmann declares that the coming of God should make believers "impatient" with the way the world is today... In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus himself ominously declares, "Keep awake therefore, for you do not know what day your Lord is coming. (Matthew 24:42-43) Cole 302. Another ancient theologian, St. Augustine reflects "So what is this day that the Lord has made? Live good lives, and you will be this day yourselves." Augustine says, "You will be this day yourselves." There is

so much joy that could surround the expectation of Jesus coming again into our lives. We could be the joy of the Lord by leading good lives. In his letter, our scripture for today, Paul reflects on being awake. The idea of being awake has little to do with the opposite of being tired and falling asleep, and more to do with awareness. It reminds me of the term "Woke."

Dictionary.com defines woke as: *having an active awareness of systemic injustices and prejudices, especially those related to civil and human rights.*

Being woke or getting woke doesn't mean just having an experience that wakes you to a certain situation in the world; it means you will never be the same now that you know.

Karl Barth would say, "This awakening describes not only the first moment of conversion but the entire life of discipleship. For Christians 'need continually to be reawakened.'" McBride 304.

Paul isn't telling the Thessalonians that they need to wake up. He tells them that they are children of the day, and so whether it is night or day they will and should live in an awake fashion. "But since we belong to the day, let us be sober." Then he lets them know what it means to be awake. It is to "wear" faith and love

as protection, and a helmet that is the hope of salvation. I wonder if he is talking about real clothes, as real as our pajamas, our onesies! How do you wear faith and love? Clothes and armor are on the outside of any other clothing. They are the part of us that people can see when they pass by. When we wear faith and love, people can see our faith and love just by looking at us. Faith and love are not articles of clothing, but are visible things that people can see when we help one another out, when we encourage one another. And the Helmet that is the hope of salvation? This hope is what keeps the knowledge of God's love within us, and does not let the hate, disagreement, violence of the world entire into us and change us into cynical, hopeless people. The helmet of the hope of salvation keeps us protected from the negativity around us.

What can you do to show faith and love? Paul reminds the Thessalonians, "For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him." And I think we too can take some reassurance from this. - God wants God's people not to be punished, but to live! And to live with God!! I love that last line so much, "whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him." That's great,

because if I tried to stay up and awake forever, I think I would die. But Paul reassures us that being awake with our eyes open and being woke, are two different ideas. We need to live woke lives, woke to others needs, to the injustices in the world, woke to the places that we can offer hope, and awake to being positive beacons showing off faith and love to those we meet.

The last sentence in our scripture today is Paul inviting his readers to do just as he is doing with them. He writes, "Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing." And that's what we should do too. This letter is meant as encouragement, and so not only should we be encouraged, but we should encourage others!

Spirit Song, you are amazing. You show up. When there is a need, you respond. You pray for one another; you support one another in times of need. You prepare meals for those who have gone through surgery or need an extra sign of love and care. You take care of the community. We are getting ready for the Fire Department Thanksgiving Meal. If you haven't signed up yet, contact Rana Nolan to bring a side or dessert. You send cards to let people know you care. You reach out to let others know about Spirit Song. You share your gifts and talents. Keep it up.

Families. You are rocking this right now. You may not feel like you are every second of the day, but let me tell you, you are. You are keeping your families safe, you are nurturing their education, their faith, you are helping to reduce the amount of stress in their life by making new things fun and focusing on the positive. Good for you. Keep it up.

Just as Christopher Robin's letter was meant to reassure but was mistakenly thought of as a scary story of a friend needing rescue, so is Paul's letter a letter of reassurance and comfort. Paul's message for the Thessalonians and the message God has for us today, is not to worry about whether we are ready for Jesus to come back, but to live in the assurance that yes Jesus will come back "In a sense it is as though the day of the Lord has already arrived for those who have received the gift of faith." Cole 306. This letter gives people that kind of assurance.

God wants you to thrive, to have salvation. Rest easy friends in this

blessed assurance. Sleep tight. I want to share a lullaby with you today before we leave. It is one of my favorite hymns.

Amen.

*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine
Heir of salvation, purchase of God
I'm born of His spirit and washed in
His blood*

*This is my story, this is my song
Praising my Savior all the day long
This is my story, this is my song
Praising my Savior all the day long*

*Perfect submission, all is at rest
I, in my Savior, am happy and blessed
You know I'm watching and waiting,
I'm looking above
Filled with His goodness and I'm lost
in His love*

*This is my, this is my song
Praising my Savior all the day long
This is my story, this is my song
Praising my Savior all the day long
Songwriters: Fanny Crosby, Douglas
Wagner, Phoebe P. Knappe*