

Do you have any plans for airplane travel over the holidays? Or maybe somebody has taken a flight to come visit you? Perhaps you're here visiting via an airplane flight. If so, welcome! Hopefully, no delays or cancellations have affected you or will affect you or your loved ones during this busy travel season.

Have you ever noticed how different people react when their flights are delayed. Experts say that people in this situation can be divided into five different groups.

First, there are the pushers. They push for information. They elbow their way up to the ticket counter demanding, "When is the plane going to arrive? I must have exact times and dates!"

Then there are the doubters. After a few minutes of waiting doubters announce, "This plane will never arrive. I'm not sitting here another minute. I'm renting a car and driving to my destination!"

Then there are the sleepers. In some cases, they snore. Others drop their jaws wide open. (Not a pretty picture!) And in the worst possible case, a complete stranger ends up using your shoulder as his pillow!

Then there are the players. Players say, "The plane's delayed? Great! It's time to go back down to the bar and have a few more drinks. Let's party!"

And, finally, there are the soldiers. Soldiers? Yes soldiers. You know, the people who are alert, on their guard, ready at a moment's notice to march onto that plane!

What kind of person are you when it comes to waiting for a plane to arrive? More importantly, what kind of person are you when it comes to waiting for **Christ** to arrive? This morning, on this final day of the church season of Advent, we look at 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 with the theme "Faithful Watching and Waiting."

THE PUSHERS- Pushers, you may recall, need exact times and dates, much like a man named Edgar Whisenant. Edgar was a NASA engineer who used his mathematical skills to set a date for Christ's return. He wrote a book called *88 Reasons why the Rapture Will take Place in 1988*. Edgar was so certain that Jesus would return on September 10, 1988, that he said, "If I'm wrong then the scripture is mistaken."

Apparently, Edgar never read **this** scripture in Mark 13:32, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." No one knows, but amazingly, Edgar Whisenant said, "I

know." September 10, 1988, came and went. No one knows. That's what Paul says, too. "Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2)

How does a thief come? He comes *unexpectedly*. He comes without warning. A thief doesn't call ahead. Christ will come like a thief in the night so let's not demand exact times and dates like the pushers.

THE DOUBTERS "While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape." (1 Thessalonians 5:3) When I was a young teenager, there was a new family that moved in on our block. I was walking down the sidewalk with a couple of friends of mine who started getting nervous because they knew the unleashed dog of the new neighbors had shown a tendency to be aggressive toward people. And I said, "No! He's a nice dog. He looks like that dog Barkley from the kids' show "Sesame Street!" In other words, I was saying: "Peace and safety!" But sure enough, as soon as I went up to the dog, he bit me on my leg. "Peace and safety!" I thought the dog was harmless, but destruction came on me suddenly. Okay, it wasn't exactly *destruction*, it was just a bite, and thankfully it didn't have rabies, but I learned a lesson that day: We can say, "Peace and safety" all we want. We can doubt reality all we want. We can ignore God's Word, the Bible all we want. But Christ has died. Christ is risen. And Christ most certainly will come again. Please, please, don't join the doubters. Something much worse than a dog bite lies in store for all who do.

THE SLEEPERS "So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled." (1 Thessalonians 5:6) It's easy to become indifferent and apathetic to Christ's Second Coming. Waiting is hard work! That's why we become spiritual sleepers. Our pet sins give us some Tylenol PM, put on some soft music, and before we know it, we're sound asleep. Some are in spiritual comas; others are spiritual Rip Van Winkles! Paul says, "Be alert and self-controlled!" Don't be a sleeper!

THE PLAYERS "... and those who get drunk, get drunk at night." (1 Thess 5:7) Abraham Lincoln died. So did Woodrow Wilson and Babe Ruth. John Kennedy died and so did Princess Diana. Unless the Lord Jesus returns first, we all will die. In our world, two people die every second, more than 155,000 people die a day and about 57 million people die every year. Woody Allen, speaks for a lot of us when he says, "It's not that I'm afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens!" Players deny that time is running out. Players ignore biblical warnings. Players have a great time. "Let's party!"

Let's not. Instead, let's go to Alaska and meet Carl McCunn. Carl McCunn prepared for an Alaskan adventure that still has people talking. In March of 1981, Carl was dropped into a remote place near the Coleen River, seventy miles northeast of Ft. Yukon. He had two rifles, a shotgun, fourteen hundred pounds of supplies, and five hundred rolls of film. Carl began his adventure, completely unaware of one detail that would cost him his life. He made no arrangements for anyone to pick him up. In August of that year Carl wrote in his diary an understatement the size of Mt. McKinley. "I should have planned for my departure." In late November of 1981, trapped with no exit plan, he died in the Alaskan wilderness. Carl McCunn forgot this basic truth: Every trip must come to an end.

Every trip must come to an end. So will yours. So will mine. So, what is our exit strategy? How will we get out? How will we make it from this life to the life of the world to come? Well, Paul says not to join the pushers, doubters, sleepers, or players. On the other hand, Paul does encourage us to be one of the soldiers.

THE SOLDIERS Remember? Soldiers stand at attention. Soldiers are alert. Soldiers are prepared at a moment's notice. "But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet." (1 Thessalonians 5:8)

When it comes to Christ's return there's a battle going on for my heart and for my head! The enemy wants to harden my heart and he wants to mess with my mind. The enemy's goal is to take away my Christmas gift; tell me it's not that important; get me to exchange it for something else.

You do know about the **best** Christmas gift. Right? It needs no batteries. It will never break. There are no shipping costs. In fact, there is no cost at all. This gift is exactly what we need; and please, don't ever exchange it. This Gift is Jesus. Jesus. The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus. The King of Kings, who destroys death and the devil. Jesus. The Lord of Lords, who is coming again to make all things new, **even you!**

So, fellow soldiers! Put on your breastplate of faith and hope and your helmet of salvation. Guard your heart and your head. Fight with all your might to hold on to the gift of Christ Jesus all the days of your life. Why is that? What's the big deal? What's at stake? "Lo! He comes with clouds descending; once for every sinner slain; thousand, thousand saints attending; swell the triumph of his train; Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ the Lord returns to reign!" And He will! Amen.