



water from rock

Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – May 26, 2022

The Lord be with you.

I was planning to talk about something different today, but I can't... I can't bring myself to do it because I'm still reeling from the slaughter of little children in Uvalde. I'm trying to pull myself together in face of this unspeakable horror, and if our grief were not enough, we have to endure the politicians and the name calling and agitating and so I've been thinking and I've been searching for how a Jesus follower is to think and to act in the face of Uvalde.

And I find myself turning to the little New Testament letter of First Thessalonians, as a guide today... First Thessalonians was probably the first book of the New Testament that was written, which went into the little church in Thessalonica, one of the first churches established in Europe by the Apostle Paul, and it is a church, it was founded in persecution and suffering. I mean, you can read all about it in Acts Chapter 17, as the first Christian converts there as they were attacked by a mob, and the apostle Paul himself has run out of town in the middle of the night, and so the apostle Paul is writing to Christians who know trouble. They know darkness. I wanna pick up in First Thessalonians Chapter 5 verse 8, "since we belong to the day, let us be sober. And put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation."

And it's this word, sober. Let us be sober. That really speaks to me today, since we belong to the day, Paul says, Let us be sober. We are face-to-face with the darkness of evil, and what happened in Uvalde, and what we see so much of in today's news, it is the utter darkness of evil, but Paul says, we belong to the day to God's new day. So let us be sober.

The Greek word translated sober is the word Nepho, that's N-E-P-H-O, and it has a lot of meaning for how God wants us to think and to act with everything that is going on in our world. The Greek word nepho does not mean being sober in the sense of not being drunk with alcohol, rather it has a sense of being level-headed, clear-headed, clear judgment. Keeping our wits about us. Self-Control. I like how one Bible commentator describes nepho says nepho is a calm, steady state of mind that evaluates things clearly so that it is not thrown off balance. Reading that reminds me, I read Rudyard Kipling great poem entitled "If", in which he talks about keeping our head, when all about us people are losing theirs and blaming it on us. Being lied about but we don't deal in lies, we talk with crowds and keep our virtue.

I think that's a pretty good way to think about it, but the Apostle Paul is saying here, since we



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belong to the day, let us be sober. Let us take our stand against the darkness, being sober-minded today, clear-headed, keeping our wits about us, self-control, and then the Apostle Paul explains more of what it means for you and me to be sober-minded today. Let us be sober. And put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. Did you hear it there? Paul's favorite triad, his favorite threesome. God's new way of faith, love and hope. Paul's world needed it. And our world sure needs that today. To see it in us. Faith, love and hope.

That is faith. Today, faith in God's goodness and God's presence with us. And that is a love. Love for God, love for others. Even love for our enemies. And hope. But Paul calls here the hope of salvation, that is the sure hope that Jesus is coming back. That Jesus is coming to set things right. The sure hope that God's kingdom, that it's really coming. And God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Writing to early Christians in Thessalonica, facing darkness. Facing suffering, God's word says, Since we belong to the day, let us be sober. And put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.

Something I find helpful when dealing well with a day like today, the grief and anger and any kind of pain, I like to do these three things...

First, I like to acknowledge my feelings, second, I like to think Right thoughts, and third, I like to set my will to do God's will.

So today, I acknowledge to God and myself what I'm feeling about of Uvalde, I acknowledge the grief, the anger, the confusion, the fear.

Second in the face of those feelings, I seek to think right thoughts that the God wants me to be sober-minded, level-headed, don't let it throw me.

And third, I wanna set my will to do God's will. To put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. So today, I want to live and act as a Jesus follower with faith, with love, and... Yes, with hope for God's great future for us. That's what I'm feeling, that's what I'm thinking. That's how I wanna act in the face of Uvalde.

I am Tim Smith, a fellow traveler. Thank you for listening. Until next time.