

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 – “Wide Awake in the Last Days”

Summary Statement:

Paul addresses the uncertainty surrounding the Day of the Lord, reassuring believers that they should not fear the coming judgment but instead live in hope and holiness as children of light, who are distinct from those in darkness.

Outline:

1. The Certainty of the Day of the Lord – 5:1-3
2. The Challenge from the Day of the Lord – 5:4-8
3. The Comfort in the Day of the Lord – 5:9-11

1. The Certainty of the Day of the Lord – 5:1-3

5:1-2 - *But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.*

At the end of chapter 4 Paul had clearly laid out the teaching of the rapture. Now in chapter 5 he switches gears a little. The heading of the pericope in my Bible is “The Day of the Lord”. Paul is making a distinction between the rapture in Chapter 4 and the day of the Lord in chapter 5.

This is evident in the wording Paul used in the beginning, ***but concerning...***

- These are the Greek words *peri* and *de*, and they are used to indicate a transition of thought. Sometimes it was used to discuss a different issue under the larger subject being addressed (as in 1 Corinthians 7:25), but typically Paul used this phrase, *now concerning*, to indicate he was changing his focus from one idea to another.

And the switch of ideas is to change from talking about what they will experience as believers to discuss what the world will now experience after the believers are caught up to be with Jesus.

These things of end times are certainly something that Paul took time to teach these new believers in Thessalonica.

- Some would love to say that Paul never talked about the rapture, or he never focused on eschatology, and yet we see from his writings in 1 and 2 Thessalonians that he spent a lot of time, in his short time that he was in Thessalonica, to talk about things to come.

- This is relevant and important subject matter for us to be concerned with. “It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.” (C. S. Lewis)¹

Now it seemed that the believers in Thessalonica were getting a little worried that they weren't ready for the Lord's return, or that they were afraid of missing it. Paul writes concerning ***the times and the seasons***... This is an expression used 3 times in Scripture (Daniel 2:21 and Acts 1:7). It seems to be a reference that was very Jewish in nature, and revolved around God's plan for the nations, of which Israel is a key nation in the prophetic timetable of God.

- Times (Gk=*chronos*) speaks of a measurement of time; the quantity.
- Seasons (Gk=*kairos*) speaks of the character of the times, the quality.
- This phrase is an important phrase prophetically as it is attached to God's plans of bringing down the kingdoms of this world and establishing His kingdom. (we see the reference to this in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Dan 2 and the disciples' question of when Jesus would restore the kingdom to Israel in Acts 1).

Of these things, Paul said he had no need to write about them. He's already addressed these things with them in the time he had with them in Thessalonica. But also, they don't need to worry about it because they're not going to miss out on these things. They won't know when Jesus is ready to come again, but they will certainly know the signs (seasons) of the day.

And Paul goes on to talk about a coming day that is going to be like no other. It will be the time that will lead up to His establishing of His kingdom.

It's the ***day of the Lord***.

What is the day of the Lord?

The day of the Lord is the period of time that will come upon the earth following the rapture. It's not a single day / 24 hour period, it's a period of time. It begins after the rapture and it consists of the tribulation period and the kingdom age.

- Interesting a Jewish day begins at sundown (night), and ends in the day (light).
- ***Genesis 1:5***, “*God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.*”

¹ Larson, K. (2000). *I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Vol. 9, p. 66). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

- In a Biblical understanding, a day begins with a darkness time period, followed by a light time period. With this idea, the day of the Lord is not speaking of the rapture because the rapture is not a dark event, it's a joyous event.
- The day of the Lord is what the world will experience after the rapture. The day of the Lord begins with the night/dark and ends in the day/light with the millennial kingdom.

Thief in the night imagery does not go with the rapture. This is not a good image. A thief breaking into your house is a bad thing. The rapture is a good thing.

- I grew up watching “A Thief in the Night”, a good Christian attempt in the 70’s to portray the rapture and tribulation in film. But the thief in the night idea really terrorized me as a kid. But after a few years of therapy I feel I’ve come through it. I do have a little PTSD when I hear a trumpet. But all in all, I’m handling it just fine.

So, we’ve made these connections with the rapture being like a thief in the night, but it’s not! The day of the Lord however will come upon people like a thief in the night. It will be surprising and sudden.

The day of the Lord is the period where God will directly intervene in the affairs of this world to execute His judgment upon the enemies of Christ. But it will also be a time where the Lord purges the nation of Israel to prepare her to receive her Messiah. It’s a period of wrath in the tribulation, but also a period of blessing in the millennial reign of the Messiah. This again gives reference to the day moving from darkness to light.

Many of the Old Testament prophets prophesied of this coming day. It’s mentioned in many passages:

(Isaiah 2:12; 13:6, 9; 58:13; Ezekiel 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18-20; Obadiah 1:15; Zephaniah 1:7, 14; Malachi 4:5).

- It is most thoroughly detailed in Revelation 6-20.

“There are four days in Scripture, **the day of man** (I Cor. 4:3, “man’s judgment,” Greek, “man’s day”), that time starting with Adam’s fall until the second Advent when unsaved man has liberty under the permissive will of God to do as he pleases; **the day of Christ** (Phil. 1:6), when Christ has His day in the catching out of His Bride at the Rapture; **the day of the Lord** (Isaiah 13:9, Rev. 6–20), the

Great Tribulation and the Millennium, when the Lord has His day, visiting judgment upon the ungodly; **the day of God** (II Peter 3:12), when God has His day, the close of the Millennium, the Great White Throne judgment, and the restoration of the earth and its planetary heavens to their pristine glory.”²

5:3 - *For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.*

Paul lays out the conditions at the onset of the day of the Lord. You would think it was a day of chaos, and I’m sure there will be elements of that, but remember what starts this day of the Lord – the antichrist establishing a peace treaty. People will be thinking that everything is rolling along just fine. But this day of the Lord is going to overtake them suddenly (that’s the thief in the night imagery).

When we see the volatile state that the world is in, where nations are jockeying for power positions and wars are happening and new ones on the brink of happening, it’s easy to begin to think, ‘This is when the Lord is going to come and bring a stop to the madness.’ Sometimes it’s almost tempting to cheer on wars thinking it’s a clear sign that the end is upon us. But notice, Paul says that peace and safety is going to be the sign that we are at the end. The world will come together in a unified way and then the dung hits the fan.

This was very similar to Jeremiah’s day when he was warning Israel of the impending judgment about to come upon them. Many of the false prophets were declaring safety and peace.

Jeremiah 14:13–14, “*Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, the prophets say to them, ‘You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.’”*¹⁴ *And the Lord said to me, “The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart.”*

We don’t like to talk about judgment; we’d much rather talk about peace. We’d much more believe in receiving peace and safety than punishment. But Paul says those days leading up to the day of the Lord are going to be marked with

² Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Vol. 12, p. 65). Eerdmans.

peace which will lull people into a false sense of safety and security. They won't be concerned about much, they'll feel comfortable and fine as though life will just keep going on without any worries.

But Paul says at that time when everything feels at ease – **sudden destruction!** This is what's concerning about people who buy into a kingdom now theology or what is also called dominionism, it's an unbiblical doctrine. Kingdom now theology is the belief that the church should be claiming back the world through gaining control over the various spheres of influence or power (ie. government, entertainment, arts, education, etc.). And it will be the church that will usher in the kingdom age and Jesus will return to simply receive the kingdom from our hands. But this is not at all consistent with what we see in the Bible. Paul is addressing this here in 1 Thessalonians 5.

We're not going to see the world move towards a Christianized utopia. It doesn't mean we shouldn't try and influence things for the better through the gospel. But our hope is not in the church, it's in Christ. He's coming back to make all things right. And to do that, He will first come in judgment to punish all the evils and sin.

And there's no getting out of this. **They shall not escape.** It's like a pregnant woman who's going into labour. When that baby is ready to be born you can't say, it's not really a good time for me. You're not driving your wife to the hospital in labour asking if you can hit the drive thru to pick up a burger for yourself. There's no time to get things right, you have to be ready.

- And don't read too much into the comparison of having children and sudden destruction 😊.

This day of the Lord is going to be an intense time. When Jesus loosens the seals in Revelation 6 the world is going to be facing the wrath of the Lamb. With the 4th seal, a quarter of the earth's population is killed. That's only in Revelation 6:8; there's still 16 more chapters to go!

There will be no place to hide. This isn't a nation or an army coming down in destruction, this is from the Almighty.

- **Revelation 6:15–17**, "And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains,¹⁶ and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of

Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! ¹⁷ For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"'

For those who are here during this time there will be no place to avoid God's judgment. Many will even seek death but they will be unable to do so (Rev 9:6).

This may sound very frightening or alarming to some. But it doesn't need to. Notice the pronouns Paul is using in vs. 3. He writes, ***when they say... sudden destruction comes upon them... they shall not escape.***

- He's not talking to believers; he's talking to unbelievers. Again, we're not talking about the rapture here. This is about those who are going to be left behind and caught off guard in the tribulation.

Notice the change in pronouns in the next verse. Paul begins to speak to believers now, and specifically to the church at Thessalonica, to comfort them. These aren't things that they need to be concerned about.

2. The Challenge from the Day of the Lord – 5:4-8

5:4-6 - But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. ⁵ You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. ⁶ Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.

As terrifying as the Day of the Lord will be, this is not something that should be worrying you, because as believers in Jesus, you are not in darkness.

Just as the day begins in darkness, this day is not something that will consume you, you will be delivered because ***you are all sons of light and sons of the day.***

You're not wandering through this world in a stupor wondering what's going on. We're recognizing the times and seasons and keeping our eyes on Jesus. We're not going to be swept up in darkness, but will be swept up by Jesus.

- Your understanding of the future should give you confidence and strength for the present.

Colossians 1:13, "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,"

Ephesians 5:8, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light"

1 Peter 2:9, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;"

We are not night people, we are light people. Because of that, there's a couple things that should characterize us as light people. We're to be alert and self-controlled.

Paul uses the term sleep here differently than he did in 4:13. There he used it to speak of death, here he uses it to speak of lethargy (Gk=*katheudō*). Sleepless and sober is how we need to be walking in these days as believers.

It's important that we don't allow the 'night' around us to lull us into sleep. Don't get complacent with the things of the world where you're yawning at the hope of Jesus' return.

Stay sober – don't allow yourself to be influenced by the intoxicants of the world.

5:7-8 - *For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. ⁸ But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.*

Those that are sleeping spiritually, and drunk morally, are doing so at night because they don't want their actions exposed by the light.

They love to remain in the dark because their deeds are evil.

- **John 3:19, "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."**

Our lives are to contrast this because we are of the day (vs. 8).

Here's how we are going to remain alert and sober (remember the word for sober means to be calm and self-controlled; temperate). And there are a lot of people spinning out of control, not only dealing with this life, but worried about the life to come – eternal life. They are anything but sober/calm. So to remain sober, Paul brings out a familiar metaphor of armor to remind us of these 3 familiar Christian virtues: faith hope and love.

We are told to put on ***the breastplate of faith and love***. This was probably the most important piece of armor for a soldier. Nobody would go to battle without their breastplate. It covered the essential organs. Likewise, faith and love is a must for the believer. Without faith you cannot be a believer, and without love you won't look like a believer. Faith protects the heart from within and keeps us in

close fellowship with Christ. Love guards the heart in our outward behaviour to others.

...and as a helmet the hope of salvation. This is an equally important part to protect. And this word hope once again is not wishful thinking, it's a confident expectation. We know that we are saved. Now this is the playing field for the enemy. He likes to play with our mind. Satan wants to come and make you think that you're not really saved. That God couldn't help you. And that's why we need the helmet of salvation on. We need to be protected from the enemy's hits. We need to stand with that confident assurance that we are saved and are children of God.

There are three tenses to salvation: past, present and future.

We have been saved from the penalty of sin, we are being saved from the power of sin, and we will be saved from the presence of sin. This is the reality when Christ returns. This is the hope of salvation!

And Paul assures us again regarding end times events, that we have nothing to fear or fret.

3. The Comfort in the Day of the Lord – 5:9-11

5:9-10 - For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

We do not have an appointment with wrath – praise the Lord! We're children of the day and have been plucked out of the darkness and night. We have no part in the day of the Lord. This hasn't happened by our own works or goodness, this has become our reality through faith in the finished work of Jesus, **who died for us**... He took the wrath of God for your sin. It was poured out on Jesus as He hung on the cross. If you've placed your faith in Jesus for salvation, you won't ever experience the wrath of God.

And we have a great hope now that whether we wake or sleep, whether we're alive at the rapture or die before that time, we'll be with Him forever.

This is wonderful news! So here's what we're to do...

5:11 - Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

Share this with others. Let this be a comfort and hope to one another.

None of this is to be doom and gloom. We're not to go around saying, the end is near, time to hunker down! Too often that's what gets stereotyped for those who hold to a dispensational eschatology. But that's not what the Bible says. No, we're to comfort each other and build each other up in this amazing assurance and hope we have. We're not destined to wrath, judgment, tribulation or hell! It's taken care of in Christ.

But are you in Christ today? Don't leave that as an uncertainty. Put your trust in Him today.

Points to Ponder:

1. Are you living with eternal awareness or earthly distraction?
 - Are decisions made as though this world is all there is, or as though Christ could return at anytime?
2. What are some things that may be lulling you to sleep or having an intoxicating influence in your life?
3. What are some ways you can move forward in faith, love, and hope this week?

The certainty of the day of the Lord should not produce fear in us, but faithfulness; the challenge of that coming day should not lead us to panic, but to purity; and the comfort of our salvation should not make us passive, but purposeful. We are not people of the night, drifting through life half-awake and spiritually dulled – we are children of the day, called to live alert, sober, and clothed with faith, love, and the confident hope of salvation. God has not appointed us to wrath but to life in Christ, and that hope should steady our hearts, sharpen our witness, and strengthen our love for one another. Until the day we are caught up to be with Him, may we live ready, encourage one another daily, and shine the light of Christ in a dark world – looking not for peace and safety here, but for our Savior from heaven.