1 Thessalonians Ch5v1-11 - Being Ready For Jesus' Return

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Preacher: Sam Ross

[0:00] So it's page 1188 in the Red Church Bibles, and we're reading from chapter 5, verses 1-11.

Now, brothers and sisters, 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. While people are saying peace and safety, destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.
But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness, so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light, and children of the day.
We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For 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. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.
[1:16] 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 in fact as you are doing.

Jesus will return. Jesus will return.
The death-defeating king of the universe has told us that he himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God.
And he will judge the deeds of every man and woman that ever lived. God's just wrath will be poured out on all evil and sin.
God's just wrath will be poured out on all evil and sin. There is nothing more serious. There is no future event matters more. Whatever about Trump's tariffs and what they mean for your livelihood, whatever about Putin's threats, and what they mean for world peace, this is absolutely nothing compared to what faces us on the coming day of the Lord.
[2:52] Peter says this in 2 Peter 3, The heavens will disappear with a roar. The elements will be destroyed by fire.

And the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. This is the coming day of the Lord.
The only day the world really needs to worry about. And when we first hear about this coming day, I think it's natural to fear, isn't it?
And it seems these young Thessalonian Christians feared they would not be saved from this coming wrath. And for the coming minutes, we're going to stop everything else.
And we're going to focus our minds entirely on that moment when we will come face to face with our maker.
[3:55] Whether Jesus comes again before today is out, or we die before he comes, we are going to come face to face with him, the holy judge.

And there is nothing more important in your life than knowing where you stand with Jesus. And in this text, the Apostle Paul tells us how we can be ready for his return.
So will you pray with me now? That we would hear what God wants us to say. Our Lord Jesus Christ, we have an enemy that wants us to forget all about you and ignore your return.
Help us to hear your word now and tremble. Convict us of sin where we need conviction. Fill us with hope where we are afraid.
Make us ready for your return. Amen. Firstly, Jesus will return like a thief in the night.

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[5:12] Look at verses 1 and 2 with me. Now, brothers and sisters, 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.

Now, what thief rings your house beforehand and says, listen, we'll be down there at around 3 a.m. Would you mind leaving the front door open and the cash on the counter?
It'll make the whole process smoother. Said no thief ever. Okay? The thief comes when the homeowner least expects.
Expect. I hope that's never happened to you. It happened to me once when I was a kid. It wasn't a nice experience walking into our house and realizing that the thief had gone through all our rooms and taken all the cash you could find.
We didn't expect it. And Jesus is not some dangerous thief seeking to steal something from you. No.
[6:18] He's the righteous returning judge. But his coming will be like that of a thief because it's going to catch many people off guard.

Now, Paul would call such people who are going to be caught off guard children of darkness. And he tells us more about them in verse 3 and 7.
Let's read that now. Verse 3. 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.
Look at verse 7. For those who sleep, sleep at night. And those who get drunk, get drunk at night. So here's what we know so far.
Children of the darkness are spiritually asleep. They can't see the spiritual reality of what's really going on in this world. Are you a light sleeper?
[7:26] I am 100% not. About 5 minutes after my head hits that pillow, I am dead to the world. Kids could be crying. Wife could be coughing up a lung. Sam snores on.

And I wake up in the morning and say, what a peaceful night. Blissfully unaware of what was really going on. Can anyone relate? Now children of darkness are spiritually asleep, unconscious.
There's this faint noise in the background of their minds of Jesus coming back. But do you know what? It doesn't even register. They just keep telling themselves, peace and safety.
Everything's just fine. They live as if Jesus won't ever come back. Is that you? Secondly, Paul says in verse 7, children of darkness are spiritually drunk.
Now God condemns drunkenness. That's plain. But people get drunk oftentimes to escape some reality they just don't want to face. So also children of darkness drink in excess of career, travel, children, shopping, Netflix, relationships, all the different things they try and fill their lives with to escape the ultimate reality of Jesus.
[8:54] They don't want to face up to the righteous returning judge. Is that you? It's very easy to be that way in Cargilline.

It's a wealthy, convenient town. We've everything we want. Our text warns us, if you are ignorant of Christ's return, asleep, or if you're trying to escape that reality, drunk, either way, you are not ready for Jesus' return.
And here's the horrifying consequence which you need to know. children of darkness would be destroyed. In verse 3, we read that just like a soon-to-be mum coming up to full term cannot escape those labour pains coming, so the children of darkness can't escape God's just wrath on their sin.
So here's the point. Don't fool around with Jesus. if you think that you can keep the king of the universe at arm's length, maybe throw some church attendance, good works, and prayers his way just to keep him happy, you are in ultimate danger and you are a fool because you can't mess around with the judge of all things.
He says, either you are for me or you are against me. there is no middle ground. He says, either you believe and act on my word that I will return or you don't believe.
[10:43] Listen to him and act on his word. If you don't, you will be caught off guard by his return and you will suffer eternal destruction separate from God.

Jesus will return like a thief in the night but secondly, fear not the coming judgment, O children of the light.
Read with me from verse 4. But you, brothers and sisters who have believed in Christ, you are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.

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You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.
What a relief for these believers in Thessalonica to hear. They don't need to fear the coming judgment of Christ because they are children of the light.
[11:58] Now, why don't they have to fear the judgment? Is it that they don't have any sin to be judged? Are they some super holy people?

No, not at all. They're still very much in the battle with sin. Here's the reason why they don't have to fear the judgment. Their lives are found in Christ who took their judgment.
He lived the perfect life they could never live. He died the death they deserved for their sin. He rose again so that one day they could rise with him to eternal life.
Are you a child of the light? Here's how you know. Have you believed in Christ? that he died for you and rose again for you?
Have you repented of your sin and said, I don't want that anymore. I'm following Jesus now. I'm still going to battle with sin but I serve a new master now.
[13:05] My life is found in Jesus. If that is you, you're a child of the light. you have no need to fear the coming judgment of Christ.

When Jesus comes, it won't really be a surprise. I mean, it will in one way but another way it won't because this is the moment you'll have been waiting for your whole life.
And on that day you will rise to meet your Lord in the air and so you will be with Jesus forever. His treasure, his bride united to him in love.
You don't belong to the night or the darkness anymore so live like it's true. That's what Paul's next point is.
Live like it's true. Be who you truly are. Number one, Jesus will return like a thief in the night. Fear not the coming judgment.
[14:08] O children of the light. Thirdly, awake and sober minded, arm yourselves to fight.

What distinguishes a child of the light from a child of the darkness is they want to fight to stay awake to Jesus.
children of the darkness are spiritually asleep and drunk. They either can't see or don't want to see who Jesus really is. And they don't see the problem with that.
But look at what Paul says in verse five and six. You are all children of the light and children of the day.
We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober.
[15:16] So children of the light are spiritually awake and sober minded. Now sleep is good for our bodies, right? I don't need to tell you more about that for me.

I can see some teenagers nodding. Absolutely. Paul tells us, however, that spiritual sleep has the opposite effect on our souls.
It's bad for our spirits. That ignoring or escaping the reality of Jesus leads us further and further away from him.
You've known that in your life, I'm sure, just like I have. And as children of the light, how easy to slip back into those old ways we used to live in, like not caring to spend time with Jesus, getting absorbed in career or leisure or entertainment, not engaging with church life, not reading the words.
But we don't have to be like that anymore. We must stay spiritually awake and sober-minded or alert to Jesus and his return.
[16:32] Now, most of us have been there, right? You're driving home on the M8 after a big day out in Dublin. Maybe it was a concert, maybe it was a shopping trip or a match, or maybe a hospital appointment, who knows?

But anyway, it's late, you feel the eyelids begin to droop. What do you do? How are you going to fight to stay awake when all you feel like doing is falling asleep on that motorway?
Here's what you do. Number one, recline your seat further back. Switch on Bram's lullaby to softly play in the background.
And you turn to the person in the passenger seat beside you and you say, would you mind not speaking to me for the next half an hour or so? I just want some peace and quiet.
Would you do that? No, you would never do that. What a fool you'd be. A recipe for disaster.
Instead, you would sit up straight, you'd wind down that window and you'd drink your coffee, you'd

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switch on Bon Jovi, full blast, karaoke mode.
[17:53] And you would plead with the person beside you to join in and say, don't you dare go to sleep on me. I need you to stay awake, to get to where we need to go.

And Paul says this, we are in a battle to stay spiritually awake. we are in a battle to stay alert on the journey to eternity with Christ.
And your enemy, the devil, he's trying to lull you back into spiritual sleep. And it's so easy to give in. He wants you to switch off and grow cold to Jesus.
He doesn't want you to be ready for him. He wants to distract you and pull you as far away from Jesus as he possibly can. what distinguishes a child of the light from a child of darkness is they want to fight him.
They don't want to fall asleep. And in that daily battle to stay alert to Jesus, there will be good days, there will be bad days, there will be days we forget.
[19:07] But what matters is we're fighting. We're fighting to stay awake. And in verse 8, Paul tells us how we can fight, how we can stay alert to Jesus.

Look at verse 8 with me. Paul says, but since we belong to the day, let us be sober in a spiritual sense, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, spirit and the hope of salvation as a helmet.
Arm yourselves to fight, Paul says, firstly, with faith. Remember all the promises that God's made to you in Christ.
And whenever you hear the devil tempting you to switch off Jesus for the empty promise of some other joy or pleasure or pursuit, fight him with faith in God's superior promises, just like these.
God, you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. God, your goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.
[20:30] God, you will make all things work together for my good. God, don't scroll your day away on your phone. Spend quality time with Jesus in his word.

Get these promises into your heart and put your faith in them day after day. Stay awake to Jesus.
Here's the second thing. Arm yourself with love. You know, when you serve your brothers and sisters in the church family or outside in love, you get closer to Jesus because he loved.
He's our example of love. So evenings and weekends are not made for Netflix or games or sport or whatever you do.
It's tempting to think that they are. We can enjoy entertainment and rest, but never let it get in the way of us serving each other in love, keeping each other awake and alert, ready for Jesus' return.
[21:39] So just think about those two things. Are you making the use of the armor of faith and love in your fight to stay awake to Jesus?

There's a third one though. Arm yourself with hope. And not just any hope. The hope of salvation.
And Paul singles this out. He leaves this to last. It seems he thinks this hope is the single most effective tool for you and I to stay spiritually awake and alert, ready for Jesus.
Now how is that so? Well it's Paul's last point. Jesus will return like a thief in the night. Fear not the coming judgment.
O children of the light, awake and sober-minded, arm yourselves to fight. Why? For God has destined you to live with Christ in endless light.
[22:52] Look at verses 9 to 11. for God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who 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 in fact you are doing. This is the hope. we are to arm ourselves with in the fight to stay awake with Jesus.
God appointed us to receive salvation, not wrath, long before you or I ever reached out for him.
That's the ultimate reason why we can stay spiritually awake to Jesus, why we can be ready for him. You see, if God has already chosen us to receive this salvation, it's going to happen.
Nothing can stop it. We will be ready because God has destined us to be ready. That is an incredible comfort.
[24:12] But some people will hear that and say, well I can just relax. Now is the time for me to kick back. Jesus has got this whole thing sorted.

He's won it for me. I don't need to stay awake or alert to him. Now let's get back to living my normal life. Jesus is just the ticket to heaven in my back pocket.

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Well, anyone who thinks that way or lives that way is completely deluded. They don't know Jesus. They show all the signs of a child of darkness. darkness. They're not a child of the light.
Be warned. God's choosing us to receive salvation does not give us a free pass to switch off from him. No. It enables us to stay alert to him.
To fight with all our might to stay awake to Jesus. part of God's plan to save us is to give us everything that we need in Christ to persevere in the fight.
[25:28] To be ready for Jesus when he returns. And again, it's not that children of the light will never sin again. It's that we want to fight sin.

It's that we know it's wrong and we want to become more like Jesus. There's a couple of verses from Ezekiel chapter 36 and we hear about this salvation that God was planning for us that God would give to the children of light.
Just read it with me. I, God says, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.
I will put my spirit in you. and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.
Can you see that? Children of light have been given a new heart that wants to fight sin and stay awake to Jesus.
[26:33] In fact, that's the proof that God has chosen us for salvation. salvation. There's a scene in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings when Saruman's forces of evil have surrounded Helm's Deep.

This was one of the last bastions for good in Middle Earth. And there is this sea of black orcs about to break down the door of this fortress and overwhelm it, killing everyone inside.
But just as they are about to break through the door, I don't know if any of you have seen the film Twin Towers, Aragorn is there and he sees this light cracking through the window, the light of dawn. and he remembers Gandalf's promise. Gandalf had told him years before, he said, look to my coming at the first light on the fifth day, at dawn look to the east.
And whenever Aragorn remembers that promise, what does he do? He finds courage to ride out into this sea of darkness and fight for his life.
[28:07] Because he knows Gandalf is coming, he knows that victory is sure. And as Aragorn and his men ride out of the fortress into the middle of the battle, it's probably the most epic scene in the movie, by the way, so Gandalf appears on the top of the mountain on his white horse with his army of light and he sweeps down from the mountains to destroy the evil forces.

And that's just a small, tiny picture for us, and I know maybe Tolkien was thinking about this too. We fight to stay awake for Jesus because we know the victory is sure.
Jesus is coming back and the forces of evil are fighting a losing battle. We will be delivered from our sin and from this broken world.
And how did Jesus accomplish all of this? Well, look at verse 10 again. He died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.
Isn't that just amazing? Jesus died for us so that we could live together with him. from start to finish, God gets the glory.
[29:35] In eternity past, he appointed us to receive this salvation. Then he came to earth, he died and rose again to achieve our salvation, and now he gives us his spirit to realize that salvation in our lives every day to help us get there.

Jesus will return like a thief in the night. Fear not the coming judgment, O children of the light. Awake and sober-minded, arm yourselves to fight, for God has destined you to live with Christ in endless light.
let's pray. We're going to take a few moments just to reflect.
where am I with Jesus? Am I a child of darkness? Or a child of light?
[30:47] Maybe you do lots of things that make you look like a Christian, but you live as if Jesus isn't coming at all. He's just an add-on in the side.

You're so wrapped up in this world. repent and turn to him and be saved from the coming wrath. And if you are a child of the light, if you are in Christ today, in what ways are you still living like a child of the darkness?
Repent of those ways and think of how you might use faith, love, and the hope of salvation to stay awake to Jesus.
Our Lord Jesus, we tremble at your coming. let every single one of us be found ready and waiting for you on the day you return to judge the living and the dead.

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Lord, that could be today. Help us to do business with you now. Amen. Amen. the musicians could come up.
[32:31] We're going to sing. This song is called O Church Arise, and this is a proper battle cry of a song.

So can I ask you, if you heard anything from God's word today that made you rejoice in Jesus, or spurred you on in the battle, would you sing this out like a proper battle cry?
Thank you.

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