

Watch and Pray

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[0:00] In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.! I'm St. Andrew's Church in Endicott, and I'm the archdeacon for Central New York.

When the bishop appointed me, I said, Bishop, do you really need an archdeacon for three parishes? He said, we're going to grow. And I believe we will grow, but I'm thankful to be with you this day in Syracuse.

I noticed in our first hymn that it spoke about begin the snow. And I guess it's begun, hasn't it? In any event, did you know that we live in the United States of anxiety?

That's what our nation has been called. According to one research program, anxiety-related issues are the number one mental health problem for women.

And the second, or second only to alcohol and drug abuse for men. Stress-related ailments cost the nation \$300 billion a year in medical bills and lost productivity.

[1:38] This high level of anxiety has even reached down to high school students. Are you in high school? Oh, you got it coming. One psychologist reports that the average high school student today has the same level of anxiety as the average psychiatric patient in the 1950s.

Our adult population has become Generation Xanax. I stole that from Pastor Max Lucado to give credit.

Oddly enough, a group of Christians living centuries earlier also dealt with anxiety.

The Apostle Paul had brought the Gospel of Thessalonica in 49 AD, and he wrote to them the next year. Paul left a thriving church in Thessalonica when he departed there to go to Berea to continue his apostolic work.

As Acts chapter 17 intimates, the church in Thessalonica experienced heavy opposition.

[2:56] Paul writes to them for a number of reasons, one of which is to encourage them to persevere despite their difficulties. One of the anxieties that bothered the church in Thessalonica was about when Jesus will come again.

Let's look at how Paul addresses this issue in our second lesson. I invite you to open your Bible or a pew Bible to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5.

We'll begin at verse 1. The Apostle Paul writes, Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you.

The Apostle Paul has already spoken to the church of Thessalonica about the times and seasons. That's why they no longer need any instruction on this issue.

The Greek words for time in the original New Testament, the Greek New Testament, are *chronos* and *kairos*. It's two different kinds of times.

[4:12] And they're both used in this first verse. *Chronos* is clock time or watch time. I'm so glad I don't see a clock at the front of this church. We have a clock at the back of the church.

And we first had one of those radar clocks. You know, they get the time from satellites. But the choir complained because they couldn't read it from the front.

And I'm thinking, you're not supposed to read it from the front. You're supposed to be engaged. This is *kairos* time. We'll get to that. But *chronos* time is a span of time like a second, minute, an hour.

A week, a day, a month, a year. *Chronos* time is a length of time like an eight-hour day or a ten-hour workday. *Kairos* time is a decisive time like Christ's coming.

It's a special time, a particular time. As in the time of grace that God ushered in when Jesus was born into our world. Worship is supposed to be *kairos* time.

[5:26] I served with a pastor when I was in seminary. And he would take his watch off and put it in his pocket. Because he wasn't our *chronos* time anymore.

You know the story about the Baptist child and the Anglican child who went to church together once at the Baptist church and the next week at the Anglican church.

Well, actually, they went to the Anglican church first. And the Baptist child was very confused by vestments and all the manner of things that we do in our worship. And he asked his friend all about those things. Well, the next week they went to the Baptist church. And there wasn't too much formality to it. The Anglican boy didn't have too many questions. But he noticed that the pastor made quite a flourish of taking off his watch and putting it on the lectern. And the Anglican boy thought, what does that mean? [6:22] And he asked his friend. And his friend just put his head down and said, not a thing. But I'm going to guess that the Baptist pastor understood about Kairos time also.

In 2 Corinthians 6.2, Paul says, now is the acceptable time. And the word there is Kairos. Now is the day of salvation.

What special time is Paul referring to in our second lesson? Let's look at verse 2. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. It's the day of the Lord that Paul is talking about. If you were here last week, you may recall that our lesson was from the prophet Amos. It was, right? Okay. Some of our churches use different lectionaries. So you can't be sure. This week we have the prophet Zephaniah as our first lesson. And Zephaniah describes the day of the Lord very vividly in our first lesson.

[7:33] It is near and hasten fast. It will be a time of judgment. It will be a day of wrath. A day of distress and anguish.

A day of ruin and devastation. It will be a day of darkness and gloom. A day of clouds and thick darkness. A day announced by trumpet blast and battle cry.

On the day of the Lord, all the earth shall be consumed. Zephaniah obviously missed Dale Carnegie's course on how to win friends and influence people.

He wasn't a devotee of Norman Vincent Peale and his school of positive thinking. He missed Zig Ziglar's approach to sales. Zephaniah was a truth teller.

A truth teller plain and simple. And so was the apostle Paul. Paul made sure that the Christians in Thessalonica knew about the day of the Lord.

[8:40] He didn't want it to come upon them unexpectedly. Although it will. For all of us. I've led three groups through Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University.

And in the first session, Dave Ramsey has a large, bright red umbrella. And Jeff sits there on stage while he's teaching various aspects of FPU.

And then he goes and he picks it up and he says, It is going to rain. Over and over again, he says, It is going to rain.

And the purpose of this exercise is to remind us in a memorable way that all of us will have a financial crisis at some point in our lives.

Our car might die. We might lose our job. A terrible health condition might happen to us or a loved one. The question is, Are you prepared?

[9:50] It is going to rain. The apostle Paul says what the prophet said before him. That the day of the Lord is coming.

And it will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying there is peace and security, that sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman.

And they will not escape. Is there peace and security? I was unsettled by what happened at First Baptist Church in Sutherland, Texas.

I'm guessing that you were too. I'd always believed that the church was the safest place on earth.

Of course, that's not true in China or the Arab Middle East or other places around the globe.

But I thought it was true in the United States of America. For those who don't know Christ as Savior and Lord, sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman.

[11:01] And they will not escape. Pregnant women know that labor pains are coming. They just don't know when. For those outside of Christ, they either don't know, they don't believe, or don't think about the sudden destruction that will one day come upon them.

In a winsome way as possible, we can tell them about it. But will they listen? Only God knows.

But you are not in darkness, writes Paul, for that day to surprise you like a thief. Followers of Christ can see the darkness in this world, but by the grace of God, we are not immersed in it.

Beyond the darkness in this world, we have been forewarned about the coming of the day of the Lord, so it should not surprise us when it happens. For you are all children of light, children of the

day.

We are not of the night, or of the darkness. By Christ, and through Christ, and in Christ, we are children of light.

[12 : 25] By Christ, and through Christ, and in Christ, we are children of the day. We do not belong to the realm of sin and evil. We've been delivered from that. Thanks be to God.

By the grace of God, we are passing through the night and darkness of this present age, on our way to the eternal light and day of God's kingdom.

This present darkness will one day be fully defeated. Do you believe that?

Until that time, Paul exhorts us, so then, so then, let us not sleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. Let us not be anxious, unaware, oblivious, morally lax, or tempted by the dangers of this world.

Keep awake. Be clear-headed and aware of what's going on. Be spiritually discerning of what's happening around you and in you. There's a spiritual war going on, and unaware Christians are some of the casualties.

[13 : 45] Paul suggests that we should be sensitive to our surroundings and the call of God on our lives. Be sober, that is, in control of your mind, will, and emotions.

discern with godly judgment the reality that surrounds you in this world. Paul reflects in verse 7, for those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night.

Night and darkness are the antithesis, what Paul is teaching with the metaphor of light and day. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.

When I was 15 or so, I played popcorn or football. And after a few practices, just running around on the field, I guess, and around the field and whatnot, we're given our uniform, and we're given our shoulder pads, and our hip pads, and those were to be put under our uniform to keep us from injury. In our second lesson, Paul exhorts us to put on a breastplate and a helmet. These are important protections for us as Christians.

[15 : 12] The helmet guards our hope of salvation, the gift of God that makes everything else worthwhile. The breastplate of faith and love equip us for the spiritual battles that face all committed Christians.

Our Tuesday morning Bible study at St. Andrews in Endicott will shortly be completing a two-month study of the Christian doctrine, justification by faith.

Our teacher has been R.C. Sproul, who comes to us via video. In that series, Sproul says, the biggest problem we face is that God is holy, and we are not.

Our sins separate us from God. But God in His love and mercy for us sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to endure death on a cross as punishment for our sins.

He did not sin. He did not have to die on a cross for Himself. He did it out of love for us. God could not make us right with Himself by ignoring our sin.

[16 : 23] To do so would diminish His righteousness. Christ's death on the cross was necessary for our salvation. We're not saved by justification by faith, but we are saved by justification by faith in Christ alone.

Nothing else. It is the love of God that is seen in the cross. It is the sacrificial love that pays the price for us and our sins.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul ties faith, hope, and love together, saying, So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love.

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul presents faith, hope, and love as our protections against the sin and evil of this world. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith, hope, and love protect us against the wrath of God that one day will be unleashed by God to vanquish all ungodliness, unrighteousness, immorality, cruelty, false religion, false piety, all sin and evil.

[17 : 54] In his book, Knowing God, Professor J.I. Packer says, To an age which has unashamedly sold itself to the gods of greed, pride, sex, and self-will, the church mumbles on about God's kindness, but says virtually nothing about His judgment.

That's true, isn't it? Packer quotes A.W. Pink, who remarks that a study of the concordance will show that there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of God than there are

to His love and tenderness.

Does that surprise you? Well, you went to seminary. I bet they taught these things at Meshota House.

I'd much rather talk about God's love and tenderness, and I will, but we can't miss the other side of the good news.

You'd much rather hear about God's love and tenderness, but God seems to think that it's pretty important that we hear about the other side of the good news. Paul follows the admonition to put on the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of hope salvation with a statement about God's coming wrath.

[19 : 24] Packer says, to reject all ideas of divine wrath and judgment and to assume that God's character misrepresented forsooth. He says forsooth.

In many parts of the Bible is really one of indulgent benevolence without any severity. This is the rule rather than the exception of my ordinary folk today. Many see God as a celestial Santa Claus. One problem with a celestial Santa Claus God is the problem of evil. This results in theologies like the one of Howard Cushner in his popular book, Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People? His answer is that God is not all-powerful. God doesn't have the power to prevent evil happening to good people. But that's not the biblical answer.

Biblical truth teaches that God is all-powerful. God is abundant in goodness and truth. And he judges and condemns those who misuse their freedom to do evil.

[20 : 37] Bad things do happen to good people. Although we should always remember all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But one day those who do evil will face God in his judgment and wrath.

Sinners saved by faith will receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen? That's the good news. Paul writes about Jesus that he died for us that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.

This is the promise that we all have all of us who follow Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Christ died on the cross so that all who receive life can live forever.

We die in this life we live forever in the greater life. This is the saving purpose of Christ's life to bring unruly sinners into God's eternal kingdom.

Whether we are alive or dead when Christ comes again God's promise to us is secure. We don't know when Christ will come again but this much we know whether we're alive when he comes again or not all God's children are destined for salvation.

[22 : 01] salvation. Here we are two Sundays before the start of Advent and the message is clear watch and pray.

It's the same message that we'll get for four weeks in Advent, right? Not quite four weeks we have this odd thing of fourth Advent in the morning and Christmas Eve at night.

But this is what saints do they watch and pray. This is what all children of light do they watch and pray.

As children of the day this is what we do we watch and pray. This is the epitome of keeping awake and sober in the Christian faith.

Girded with a breastplate of faith and love and a helmet of salvation shielding our head we watch and pray. As followers of Christ we have a great future.

[23 : 08] Most of us don't need Xanax. All of us need Jesus. The Apostle Peter tells us cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

The Apostle Paul tells us do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God. Anxiety can destroy our lives and certainly can diminish our relationship with God.

The medicine that counteracts anxiety is prayer. Doesn't sound too exciting does it? It's so much easier to pop a pill.

Pastor and author Max Lucado reports that over the past few decades studies have shown that Americans are the most anxious people in the world. Why is that?

It doesn't have to be this way. The Bible tells us trust in the Lord with all your heart and leave not on your own understanding in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths.

[24 : 29] And while you're trusting and acknowledging the Lord watch and pray. Let's pray right now. Our heavenly father we don't know the times or seasons any more than the Thessalonians did

but we thank you Lord that you are our guardian and protector.

Lord there is not peace and security in this world except by you. We thank that you guard our lives. we pray for the people of First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs Texas that you would comfort and strengthen them in their adversity.

We pray Lord that as we face the evil of this world that we would face it with the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of salvation. This is our hope and we give you thanks for your grace in our lives.

We thank you Lord for what you're doing with us and in us. And Lord we thank you that you've given each of us to each other to encourage one another and build one another up. And thank you Lord for the places where that is happening.

In your name Lord Jesus we pray. Amen.