

The Day of the Lord: Not in the Dark

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[0:00] I will pray while we remain standing. Father, thank you so much for all that you have given us in Christ. Thank you for the grand hope that you have given us in him.

And we pray today that as we read the scriptures together, you would give us more insight into this. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, I want you to imagine that it is Friday evening.

The week has been a long week and weariness has set in. And for this particular man, he wants to recover a little and unwind. And so that first drink is taken.

And then the second. And then the third. And then before long, drunkenness sets in. Now, friends, if you have never experienced them, the effects of alcohol are very well known and well documented.

The progress of alcohol on your system is well attested. And the first notable things that you might feel are the lifting of anxiety and perhaps the relieving of tension.

[1:09] And gradually a person who's drinking becomes a little more carefree than they were before they started drinking. And social inhibitions are sort of a little more relaxed than they might have been otherwise.

And the results are different, of course, with every person. But common reactions to over-drinking or even to just getting started with drinking is an increased talkativeness, cheerfulness, contentment, perhaps even sociability.

But also there are less positive things. That is, there's the impairment of judgment. Perhaps people's perceptions begin to alter as well. Friends, getting drunk on alcohol, I think, is a great image of a larger problem in contemporary Western society.

You see, my view is that we are addicted to wealth, addicted to peace, addicted to safety. And we have, as it were, become drunk on these things.

Let me explain what I mean. I want you to think for a moment just about Australia in particular. You see, we live in a fairly sheltered society. We have not experienced a war for over 60 years now.

[2:16] We are amongst the most wealthy people who live on this planet in real terms. We enjoy freedom and all the benefits of a democratic society.

And they are immense. And I think after a little while we've become so used to them that we've become inured to them and have even become, you know, in one sense, a bit drunk on these things.

The tensions of life have lifted. We've generally become more carefree. Our shopping centres, our advertising demonstrates that we have become more economically relaxed.

It's true that various aspects, various things that have happened in the last 20 years have sort of shocked us a little bit and very briefly out of our stupor. For example, you might remember, I remember where I was when the events of 9-11 occurred.

And it shocked me out of that more relaxed feeling about where we were as a society. I remember remembering the words of the psalm, you know, which talk about teach us to number our days because all of a sudden our days were numbered and the world was going to change.

[3 : 23] Or for some of us, another event that shocked us was the global financial crisis. But I think those things are just little sort of blips on the horizon mostly for us. That is, the drunken binge continues.

We get on with normal life and we go on marrying and giving in marriage and marrying our kids and watching our grandchildren grow up. And our culture, though, is one that is drunk on peace and safety.

And in that way, I think our culture is not that different from the culture of 1 Thessalonians. You see, they lived in a world which was relatively wealthy and the Pax Romana or the peace of Roman rule had brought to them a stability in the world that was good.

And as verse 3 seems to indicate, they were prone to think that their world of peace and their world of security would never be disturbed, but life would go on as it always had.

And Paul warns them. And across the centuries he warns us to be careful of the drunken stupor that we often get into. For the Lord of all the earth is not asleep and he may very well shake us out of our drunken state with an eternal reality.

[4 : 34] That's what Paul is doing in this passage. Friends, last week Paul talked to us about death and about dying, about the dead. This week he's going to talk to us about how we should live in the light of the facts that he's going to reveal to us.

This week he's going to talk to us about how to live. So let's turn and let's see what God has to say to us from his word this morning through his apostle Paul. So turn with me if you could to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verses 1 to 11.

Now, the first thing I want you to notice is the heading of this passage. You see, Paul is addressing people about times and seasons. Now, I need to tell you this particular phrase only occurs one other place in the New Testament and once in the Old Testament.

The place it occurs in the New Testament is Acts chapter 1 verse 7. And it introduces a time when the apostles are wondering about, the early disciples are wondering about when the Lord will restore the kingdom to Israel.

And the response indicates that they aren't to worry about times and seasons. The phrase also occurs in Daniel chapter 2 verse 21 which is a sort of story of the great end of time.

[5 : 44] And it seems as though this stock standard phrase, times and seasons, is a way of talking about the end of time. It's a way of talking about God's wrapping up of history.

And it's probably a stock standard phrase that is used by Christians in those days. And so what Paul is doing is he's bringing this topic out into the open. He's saying, look, about the end of time, let me tell you a few things.

He's going to address this issue. Now, apparently, he's already taught the Thessalonians something about this. Look at verse 1. This indicates that. Paul says, Now, concerning times and seasons, brothers and sisters, you don't need anything to be written to you, for you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

Now, I love the language here because perhaps you might recognise it. Those of you who are parents, I'm sure, recognise it. You know very well that. That would be the modern way of putting it.

That's what I think he is saying. Here is a pastor or a parent addressing his children and it's the language of a parent or a pastor. He knows his congregation have been taught these things and he wants to remind them of what he seems to, he thinks they might have forgotten a little.

[6:51] You yourselves know that. And off he goes. Perhaps he fears that they haven't really cottoned on yet, so he reminds them of what they should know. Listen to him again. You yourselves know that very well that.

Now, I want you to notice the specific words that Paul uses. You see, in verse 2, he talks about a thing called the day of the Lord. And in verse 4, he calls that very same thing that day. And it may very well be that later on, he calls it the day.

And that language is very common in the Old Testament. It goes back to the Old Testament and in the Old Testament, the day of the Lord refers to a day when God intervenes into human history and reveals himself to his world and judges his world and judges his people.

In the Old Testament, the words the Lord referred to God, the Lord. But here they refer strikingly to the Lord Jesus Christ. So, Paul's doing what he's done throughout this letter.

He's saying that that Lord Jesus Christ you believe in, he is God himself. Well, he's identifying Jesus with God. However, let me tell you about the earliest reference to the day of the Lord in the Old Testament.

[7:57] It's wonderful. I love it. It's a verse. It comes from the book of Amos and it appears from the book of Amos that God's people throughout their history had thought, we'll be okay. The day of the Lord will be a day when God judges the world and avenges us on our enemies.

It'll be a wonderful day for us. And Amos is beginning to think, given the sinfulness of the people of God, it may not be as good as they think. And so, it has this wonderful story about what it will be like for them.

And it's told in Amos chapter 5 and rather than getting you to look it up, I'll tell you what it says. Amos 5, 18 to 19 uses the imagery that goes like this. He talks about a man who's sort of out and wandering away from his house for the day.

And as he journeys, he comes across a lion and he does what you and I would do in the face of a lion, runs. Now, as he runs, he happens to come across a bear which makes him run even more.

And he runs home and he runs into his house and he slams the door and he feels like all of us would think, I've made it. I've escaped the lion. I've escaped the bear. And, you know, he's pretty tired from running and it's a clay sort of brick house and so he puts his hand up on the wall to rest and sort of recover his breath and a snake comes out of the wall and bites him.

[9:09] He says, the day of the Lord's going to be like that. It'll be a day of surprises. It'll be a day of no escape. It'll be a day when you think, you know, there's nowhere else to go and finally you get to the place of security and you're surprised again.

A day of surprises, a day of darkness, Amos says. It'll be a day of gloom for you, the people of God. So that's the first bit of background. So the day of the Lord is, you know, sort of not got a good press up until this point.

Now, Jesus adds to it. He says it's not only a day of judgment, not only a day of destruction and darkness and gloom, but it's another sort of day and it has some other characteristics.

So in your Bibles, could you turn to Matthew chapter 24 with me? So Matthew 24. And most of you will know that Matthew 24 is this passage about the end of the world perhaps or certainly the coming of Jesus and in Matthew 24, there's some great teaching about this and I'm going to read or reflect on some verses from 36 on.

Look at verse 36. Jesus talks about that day and hour. Now look at verse 37. He talks about the days of the coming of the Son of Man and he talks about people who are drunk with safety and security in the days of Noah.

[10:33] Can you see what he's saying? They were, the days of Noah were like our days and they were marrying and giving in marriage and going about life and this was what happened.

The flood came. God acted in judgment and then in verse 39 he says, Now what happened then will be like, how it will be in the days of the coming of the Son of Man and look at verse 43 and I'll read it for you.

But understand this, that if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming he would have stayed awake and would have not let his house be broken into. Therefore you must be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Can you see what's going on here? You see, the Old Testament has told us that day will be surprising and full of judgment and Jesus says it'll be a sneaky day in the sense that it'll sneak up on us and be surprising.

And look at what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5. Look at verses 2 to 4. He says, For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. Here he echoes the words of Jesus.

[11:36] And when you say there is peace and security then sudden destruction will come upon them as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman and there'll be no escape. But you beloved, you're not in darkness that that day surprise you like a thief.

Friends, the Old Testament and Jesus and Paul are clear on this point. There is a day that is coming upon this world. It is a day of God.

It is a day of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is a day that will be as unstoppable as a woman who finds herself pregnant trying to hold off the birth. It cannot be escaped.

It is coming. This is the clear teaching of Scripture and it is repeated throughout Scripture. It's endorsed by Jesus. It's endorsed by his apostles.

It is going to happen. So if that's the case, what's the big question? How do I get equipped for that day? If it's coming, how do I stop it being a day like, you know, our poor man in Amos?

[12:38] How do I prepare for it? We need to know, don't we, how to approach this day. And that's what this passage is all about, how to approach the day.

And Paul's giving us some teaching as to how to approach the day of the Lord. Now, with that in mind, I want you to notice something about this passage. I want you to notice that Paul talks about two groups of people.

Did you notice them when we read it? Two groups of people who will be affected by this day. First, he talks about you or us. And then he talks about they or them.

Look at verse 3. Paul talks about they. They say there's peace and security. Paul then says some very nasty, talks about some very nasty effects that the day of the Lord will have upon them.

Then verse 6, he talks about others. So let's see if we can work out who exactly are the they, in this passage because that's very important, isn't it? I'll tell you how I think we can work out who the they are.

[13:39] I think Paul thinks that all of humanity is going to be divided into the they and the us or the we or the you. Two groups of people. There will be them and there will be us or you.

Now, so the way to work out who the them are, I think, is to work out who the us are because I think this passage is a bit clearer about the us. So let's see if we can work out who the us are and then we'll be able to work out who the them are because they're the exact opposite of the us.

Does that make sense? So let's give it a shot. Now, see if you can identify who the you and the us are. Look at verse 1 with me. They're identified.

They're brothers and sisters. In other words, they're Christians. Now look at verse 4. They're the beloved. Well, the word is actually brothers or brothers and sisters.

Now look at verse 5. They're a group of people who could be considered to be the children of light. They're children of the day. But let me tell you the most critical verse and this is why I've gone this route is verse 9.

[14:43] Have a look at verse 9. We're told that these are people who have obtained salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. They're destined for salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, God has a goal for the people, for these people and that goal is salvation. These are people who God has a goal of salvation for and who have an agent of salvation and that agent of salvation is our Lord Jesus Christ.

But that's not the only thing that is said here because they're also people who have a means by which they are saved. Can you see it there? The salvation, the means of salvation is our Lord Jesus Christ.

who died for us. Friends, these brothers and sisters are brothers and sisters because they share something in common.

They share the Lord Jesus Christ. God's goal for them as a whole is salvation. God's agent for their salvation is the Lord Jesus Christ and God's means of salvation is a saviour who died for them.

[15:46] Now, I reckon that's a great little summary of who we are as the people of God. It's wonderful, isn't it? We are God's saved people, saved through Jesus Christ, saved through his sacrificial death for us.

Saved people, saved through Jesus Christ, saved through his sacrificial death for us. Friends, that is who we, the we of this passage is. It's those people.

They are God's saved people and if that's who you are as well, then you're with them. You are God's saved people. So, that's God's saved people by Jesus, group number one.

Now, with that in mind, we can go back to who the other ones might be. They are those who are not Christians. Those who are not Christians are the exact opposite.

So, let's try and put some terminology together for them. They have no agent of salvation, obviously. They have no saviour and no means of salvation.

[16:46] They are not brothers and sisters. They must not be in the light but are instead in the dark. They are those who get drunk with peace and security when really there's no peace and security for them because they haven't got a saviour.

They are children of the night. They are, as the passage says, destined for wrath. So, you can see how Paul's guidance here helps us to approach the day of the Lord.

What's the first bit of guidance? It's the clearest day, isn't it? That is, how do I approach the day? To be a person who has that goal of salvation.

To be a person who has an agent of salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ. To be a person who has appropriated God's means of salvation, the death of Jesus Christ.

So, that's the very first bit of advice as to how to face the day. Don't be in the dark. Be in the light. Don't be drunk with a false reality. Know that the day of the Lord is coming and be prepared for it by soberly depending upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

[17:51] Now, that's the very first bit of guidance. The second bit is also here in the passage about approaching the day of the Lord. And the key verses are verses 5 to 7. So, look at them with me if you might.

You see, I want you to look at the exhortations Paul gives. Let me read verses 5 through to 7. For you are children of light and children of day and we are not of the night or of the darkness.

So, let us not fall asleep as others do but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep at night, who sleep, sleep at night and those who are drunk get drunk at night.

You see, look at the exhortation Paul gives. In chapter 1, do you remember Paul talked about people who are waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ? They turn from darkness to light. They turn from idols to serve the true and living God and to wait for his Son from heaven.

These are people who know Jesus is going to return and are hanging out for it. And so, they wait for this dawn. They are not asleep. Now, I want you to think about this for a moment.

[18:54] Mostly, when we talk about getting drunk, it's in the early part of the evening. But this imagines that people have got drunk and they've got drunk in that early part of the evening and they've gone drunk into the night and then they've fallen into a drunken stupor.

There's another group of people, like Jesus refers to, who've stayed awake all night and they're still alert as the dawn begins to come and there they are ready for something to happen.

Why? Because they haven't been drinking, they haven't been taking on false realities. They've been waiting for the reality. They're vigilant, they're sober, they're awake, they're waiting and as they wait, they do appropriately.

They act as sober children of the light. Look at verse 8. Look at the words Paul uses. He used them in chapter 1 and he's going to use them here again. They're key Christian words.

Can you see them there in the passage? He talks about faith, hope and love. Again, go back to chapter 1 sometime and have a look at it. He does exactly the same thing.

[19:57] You see what he's saying? He's saying, you are to be people who face the day of the Lord full of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You are to face the day of the Lord full of love for God and love for others.

And you are to face the day of the Lord full of hope for Jesus Christ or because of Jesus Christ. They are people who not only look the part of Christians, they act like Christians, they love like Christians, they believe like Christians, they hope like Christians.

Now look at verse 11. They then turn to their fellow Christians and they encourage them as Christians. They build them up. They make sure that they're there in the morning when the day dawns and the Lord Jesus Christ comes.

Friends, Paul is encouraging his people to focus on the end of history and his goal, can you see it? If you keep your eye on the end of history, you'll be useful in the present.

You will be of such heavenly mind that you'll be of earthly use. That's what's going on. His goal is to focus them on the future to produce in them good in the present and good living in the presence of God that they are destined to spend eternity with.

[21:10] He's preparing them for that life by telling them what is coming. His aim is to produce faith, hope and love. Friends, let's see if I can wrap all of this up for us and summarise what we've learnt.

Now, in our passage last week, Paul was answering the question about the dead, wasn't he? And about those who have died in Christ. And I talked to you about death and I urge you to prepare for death.

And remember, I talked about dying well. Well, you might remember that in my four tips on dying well, I mentioned that you should live well. That is one of the tips about dying well, live well.

Well, Paul's now got to that himself because he's talking about how to live well. And Paul gives us some advice about how to do it. So, if my passing line was live well last week, this is a little more information, a bit more advice.

And his advice is there is a coming day. This is how to live well in the present, to know there's a coming day. Friends, the world we live in is, I think, a world drunk on reality.

[22:16] Our world is drunk on peace and safety and perhaps we've been sucked in by it. But if we've read this passage well, the peace and safety we experience in our world today can only be temporary.

It is going to be shattered. God's going to intervene in history in a way far more dramatic than 9-11. He's going to shatter human history in a far more overwhelming way than any global financial crisis.

He is going to totally upturn the world by intervening as God and judge on the coming day. And that coming day will be the day of the Lord Jesus.

It will be his day. And Paul has told us what that day will look like. If you're not us or we, if you're not believers in the Lord Jesus, it will be a day of awful and inescapable judgment.

There will be nowhere to go to hide from it. There will be no way you could expect it. There will be no one accepted from it. It will come like a thief in the night and it will come with sudden destruction and it will come sneakily.

[23:24] It will come awesomely. It will come inescapably. It will come destructively. Friends, the God who created the world is coming to judge the world in his son.

He's coming to judge it on the day of the Lord Jesus Christ and on that day there will only be two groups of people. The first group are those who have been lulled into that false sense of security thinking that life would just go on as it always has as they thought in the days of Noah.

Those who have deadened themselves to God by imbibing a false sense of peace and security that have acted as though this world is all that there is to life that have lived for today and who are therefore children of the night and for them the day of the Lord will be a day of darkness and deep despair.

The second group of those are those for whom God has this goal of salvation for those for whom he has an agent of salvation the Lord Jesus Christ those who have depended upon God's means of salvation the death of Jesus Christ and these people will be up early that day they'll be up waiting they'll be waiting for the dawn to come as they waited every day you see they will meet the Lord in the air these people and he will greet them and for them this day will be of unsurpassed wonder and glory it'll be a day when tears will pass away from their eyes it'll be a day when there'll be no more pain and no more tears and no more death and the old will have passed away and the new will have come and they'll be like the Lord Jesus Christ they have worshipped for they'll be with him and they will see him as he is friends can you see and hear what Paul is saying here they will be with him in life or in death they will be with him forever concerning the times and the seasons can you see what he's saying the big issue he's saying exactly the same thing as Jesus the big issue is not timing friends the day of the

Lord could be today it could be tomorrow it could be in 200 years when we have all died the big issue is not timing the big issue here is what sort of person you are as you face that day are you one who has faith in a Lord Jesus who died to save you are you one who has faith in a living Lord Jesus Christ who rose from the dead sits at the right hand of God and through whom the power of death is defeated friends are you in the light then if you are then live like it live as a person who has faith in Jesus Christ live as a person who has love love for Jesus love for God love for God's people love for God's world and live as a person of hope a person who eagerly waits for our Lord Jesus Christ whom God raised from the dead Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come a person who then turns and encourages others with this who builds up others friends I want you to just sort of briefly turn and look around the others around about you some of them you know well some of them you know only fleetingly some of them you may never have met before in your life

[26 : 53] I want you to imagine that you knew the Lord Jesus was returning tomorrow what would you need to repent of in your relationship with that person what would you want to say to that person if you know them well what would you wish you'd never said or done what would you be embarrassed about in relation to the life you've lived among God's people here at Holy Trinity Doncaster what would you be embarrassed about in relation to the life you've lived in the world in your workplace in your relationships friends we have a living Lord Jesus and he's concerned about how we live and he wants us to live well and living well means believing well it means hoping well and it means loving well it means believing well it means hoping well it means loving well and if you can't if we cannot get this right as God's people what hope have we got so friends I want us to start here let me encourage you the

Lord Jesus Christ is coming back if you believe in him then this will be a day of great rejoicing for us have let me encourage you to spend your time encouraging each other with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ this is almost a dead world word in our world today but the Lord Jesus is coming and the New Testament talks about it all the time and let me also encourage you to spend your time as you wait for the Lord Jesus building each other up let's not tear each other down friends it's so easy and it demolishes churches and it demolishes lives let's build each other up now I know and have already experienced here I've been here for I think six or seven weeks now that you are a congregation that does this well you do work well on encouraging each other I want to urge you to do it even better let's believe well let's hope well and let's love each other and God's world well

Amen so let's pray Father we know that whether we are alive or whether we are dead we are with Christ so Father please help us to live as though that was the reality please help us to be people who believe well who hope well who love well and who encourage well we pray this in Jesus name