

Concerning The Coming Judgment

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[0 : 00] 1 Thessalonians 5, 1-11. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.

For you are all children of light, children of the day. We're not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us keep awake, be sober.

For those who sleep, sleep at night. Those who get drunk are drunk at night. 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.

For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we might live with Him.

Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. Amen. Many of you know that I spent my teenage years in a tiny mountain town in East Tennessee.

[1 : 41] The town is called Unicoi. It's a weird name. I don't know where it came from. It's odd. It matches probably the personality of the town, to be honest. It's a little bit odd. The high school I went to, though, it was near Bristol, Virginia, Bristol, Tennessee.

If you know anything about the area, the city sits on the border of the two states, so I don't really know how you're supposed to refer to it. But that's where my high school was. It was just outside of Bristol on the Tennessee side of the city, which was about a 45-minute drive at the time from where we lived.

But our house was just far enough away that whenever the school sent mail, the letters or whatever it was that they were sending typically would arrive at our house in Unicoi about a day later than the rest of my classmates.

And this was before schools digitized everything and communicated everything virtually. And every nine weeks or so, the school would mail to my parents a report card.

The audacity of such a thing to tell on me to my parents. They would do that every nine weeks. And unfortunately, there were a few times that awaiting that report card was a bit torturous, to be honest.

[3 : 07] Knowing that I had not applied myself to my studies as my parents expected me to do, I grew anxious about what we might call the coming day of judgment.

One of the problems is that I didn't know exactly when the report card would make its way to the mailbox. I didn't know exactly when they would be sent out.

And I didn't know exactly when it would arrive even after it was sent. And as the inevitable day drew closer, as my anxiety about what might happen grew, I would start pestering everybody at school about it.

I'd stick my head in the guidance counselor's office. She seemed to like me. And I'd say, you know, have you sent out the report cards yet? I'm just curious when my parents will get to see what I've been doing for the last nine weeks.

And she might would let me know. And then I'd start going to all my classmates because I told you, typically the mail would arrive to their house about a day earlier, usually, than what it would arrive at my house. And I'd start asking my classmates, did you get your report card yet?

[4 : 17] I was trying to prepare myself as best as I could for what was to come, fearful that what awaited me was the wrath of Harold and Peggy Blankenship.

And sometimes that's exactly what it was. We come to 1 Thessalonians 5. We find that some of the Christians in the church of Thessalonica seemed to have a similar kind of anxiety, but it was about the second coming of Christ.

That future event is at the heart of this entire letter. We're learning that now. Now that we're approaching the end and we're able to start piecing together all the things that we've seen and

heard and read, we're starting to see there is an underlying theme to the book, something that Paul continues to drive chapter after chapter after chapter.

And then when we get here, we realize what it is. The undercurrent of this letter has to do with the return of Jesus. And from chapter 4 verse 13 through chapter 5 and verse 11, Paul directly addressed some of the concerns that the Thessalonians had.

In 4, 13 to 18, we understood last week that the issue there was that they had a lack of information about the future resurrection of the saints and their lack of information had led to a hopeless grief.

[5 : 53] They were beginning to grieve the loss of their brothers and sisters in Christ in a way that looked more like the unbelieving world where that had no hope than like those who had the hope of Christ.

But the problem was a lack of information. And Paul addressed the lack of information in order that they might be comforted in their grief. When we get to these verses in chapter 5, the issue isn't a lack of information.

The issue here is a lack of assurance. And with the lack of assurance came a fearful anxiety as the day of the Lord, the return of Christ, approached.

Now, I want to be clear about the nature of the problem by acknowledging that there is a difference between a lack of assurance and what we would say is a lack of faith.

A lot of times we lump the two things together where we would see someone who perhaps is struggling with the assurance of their salvation and we would automatically equate that to a lack of faith in Christ and His gospel.

[7 : 07] Those two things are not the same. A believer may have all of his or her hope and trust resting in the person and the work of Jesus Christ and still at times battle a sense of insecurity as to whether or not he will be able to stand in the judgment.

The Christians to whom Paul was writing were not lacking faith in Christ, neither were they wavering in their hope in the gospel.

That's not what's happening here and we need to be clear about it. The letter has repeatedly affirmed that they were full of faith in Christ which was proven through their perseverance in suffering.

Paul says all the way back in chapter one, I know, I am confident that you are the elect of God, you're chosen in God and here's why, because your faith in Christ continues to flourish and persevere despite incredible persecution.

That's reiterated once again in chapter three when Timothy comes back with his report and Paul rejoices because in their perseverance, their belonging to God is proven.

[8 : 28] So what we do not want to do is come to this text and say, well, there is some kind of lack of faith on the part of the Thessalonians. That's not what's actually happening here. They didn't doubt Jesus, but it does seem that some of them worried about his coming.

They worried that when he arrives, maybe they wouldn't stand. The reason for their fear, as we'll find as we work through the text, is a combination of the terrifying prospect of God's judgment with the reality of continued sin in their lives, the presence of sin.

They knew Christ was coming and they knew that when he comes, he will come in judgment. They also knew that despite trusting in him, they still battled the presence of sin in their lives.

And when they brought those two things together, it created a sense of anxiety and uncertainty, lacking a sense of assurance about their standing with God.

Now surely you can relate to this. If you're a believing Christian, surely you know what it's like to trust Christ, to know that your faith is in him, that your faith is in what he has done, and yet also question at times whether or not you truly belong to him.

[10 : 06] That on that final day, you might not escape his wrath, not because of him and any lack in him, but because you understand your own shortcoming and failure and sin.

Surely you understand what that's like. The point of this text is to reassure and instruct believers of their destiny at Christ's return.

The tone of what Paul writes here is not corrective, even though he exhorts them in one place. It's not corrective. He's not frustrated.

He's not irritated. The tone of the text is reassurance. Like a parent coming alongside their child who's discouraged and lifting them up and saying, it's okay, doing all right.

That's what Paul's doing here. He's reassuring believers. He's instructing believers of the reality of their destiny, their true destiny, when Christ returns.

[11:16] And to fully grasp the comfort that Paul sought to provide in the passage, I want to point out three things in the text. I want to show you the reality of the coming judgment.

We want to look soberly at that. I want to show you two reassurances for those who are in Christ, who belong to God by grace.

And then finally, I want to show you the proper response for those who have received the assurance of their future salvation. Okay? That's kind of the path that we're going to follow as we go.

First thing I want to show you is the reality of the coming judgment. Reality of the coming judgment. Look again at the first three verses. Now concerning the times and seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you.

For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying there is peace and security, then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman.

[12:23] And they will not escape. It's the reality of what is to come. Now again, this is not a separate event from what is covered in chapter 4 verses 13 to 18.

What it is, is a different perspective of the same event. Christ's return, what we often call the second coming of Christ, will begin with the redemption of those, both dead and living, as we studied last week.

It will begin with the redemption of those who have trusted in Christ for salvation. Those who are His will be redeemed and saved in the day of judgment.

And then the coming of Christ, what's reflected in chapter 4 verses 13 to 18, will then give way to what is referred to as the day of the Lord, in which Jesus will judge the earth and all that's in it.

And it's this dynamic of judgment referred to as the day of the Lord that is the focus of 1 to 11 in chapter 5. Same event, different perspective of the event.

[13:29] Now some of the Thessalonian Christians, like I did in high school, were concerned about the timing of those things. Worried that they would be unprepared the day that Jesus did actually arrive.

And of course, the times and seasons of these things are known only to God. So Paul says, you don't need me to write to you about that because you know that we don't know when this is going to take place.

We don't know the times and seasons. Now where is Paul getting that? Well, he's getting that from Jesus, isn't he? Remember just before Jesus ascends back to heaven in Acts chapter 1, remember what the last question was that his disciples asked.

They said, Lord, will you now restore the kingdom? Will you now bring the kingdom? They couldn't get their minds off of it. They were fixated on it, longing for it.

There wasn't time for that. Remember what Jesus said in Acts 1, 7. He said, it is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

[14:34] In other words, this is known only to God. It is a day fixed sometime in the future. It is coming. We don't know exactly when. Paul didn't know exactly when. And though they were clamoring to try to get a sense of when is this going to happen, Paul just reminds them right off the bat, the times and the seasons, brothers, you don't need me to write about that.

You don't need me to speculate about it because we don't know. All of this was something that the Thessalonians knew well. We see that in verse 2. For you yourselves are fully aware.

You yourselves. That's emphatic both in Greek and in English here. He could have just said you're fully aware. No, he brings emphasis, doesn't he? You yourselves, you know this.

You know. You know that the day of the Lord is going to come like a thief in the night. It's intensifying the assertion that they were fully aware of this truth already.

So in 4, 13 to 18, their grief rose from something that they hadn't been yet taught. In 5, 1 through 11, here, their anxiety comes precisely because of something that they had been taught.

[15:47] Do you see the difference? Before, they didn't really know how to fill in the gaps and it was leading to grief. But in this case, the day of the Lord, they know exactly what's going to happen on that day.

They know exactly what that's going to be like and it's their knowledge actually that's producing their anxiety now. And what was it that they were so anxious about?

They were fully aware of the reality of the coming judgment of God on the day of the Lord. The truth of what Jesus is going to do upon His return made them afraid.

Now Paul used familiar imagery here to describe the day of the Lord. The idea of a thief in the night underscores that this event, the coming of the Lord, the day of the Lord will be both unexpected and destructive, harmful.

You don't know when it's coming and you know that when it does come, it's going to be dangerous. And then he explains the image in verse 3. Look at what it says.

[17:03] While people are saying there is peace and security, then sudden destruction will come upon them. He's fleshing out the illustration of the thief in the night, isn't he? The people here in verse 3 are unbelievers who like the unsuspecting homeowner feel at peace.

They feel secure. And for them, Christ's return will bring sudden destruction.

Peter used the same imagery but he detailed the events a little differently. In 2 Peter 3.10, but the day of the Lord will come like a thief and what will it bring?

Then the heavens will pass away with a roar. The heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved. The earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

That's the reality of the day of the Lord. The Thessalonians understood that that is the reality of the day of the Lord and in speaking of it, Paul uses the same imagery as Peter.

[18:11] He says it will come on unbelievers with sudden destruction like a thief in the night. And then he uses the second image in verse 3 to drive home the point, doesn't he?

The day of the Lord will come upon unbelievers like labor comes upon a pregnant woman. And what does he mean? It will be sudden and once it starts you can't stop it.

Charlie will be a year old next month. We went to bed on March 20th. Julie felt great. I woke up on March 21st and Julie said, I think I need to go to the hospital.

The labor pains came suddenly and there was nothing I could do to stop it at that point. Paul says, that's what this day will be like. It's like a thief in the night.

It's unexpected. It's destructive. It's going to come with sudden destruction like labor pains, like a pregnant woman and they will not escape.

[19:18] Once it starts, once it's here, there's nothing you can do. It will be too late. Nothing you can offer, nothing you can argue on that day.

will turn away the wrath of God. Zephaniah 1:18. God says, neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the Lord.

In the fire of his jealousy all the earth shall be consumed for a full and sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth. The reality is that Jesus is coming back and though his first coming was to save, his next one will be to judge.

And if you do not turn to Christ, that day will bring you sudden destruction and you cannot escape.

That's why over and over again the biblical writers emphasize today is the day of salvation.

Do not delay. Turn to God while you can because his patience will come to an end. It will come to an end on the day that he is fixed and once the day comes you can't stop it.

[20:44] So Isaiah says, seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts.

let him return to the Lord that he may have compassion on him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon. What grace of God to say I am coming in judgment.

Come to me now for safety. Come to me now for pardon. Zephaniah 2 seek the Lord all you humble of the land who do his just command.

Seek righteousness. Seek humility before God. Perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord. Hebrews 3 therefore the Holy Spirit says today if you hear his voice do not harden your heart.

Why? Because today is the day. Now is the time. And when his day comes there will be no escape.

[21:58] Why were some of the Thessalonians anxious about Christ's return? It wasn't because they doubted him and his gospel. It was because the reality of his judgment is absolutely terrifying.

It's terrifying. we will all stand before our maker and only those who have obeyed his word by faith will escape his wrath.

And they were fully aware of it and what it produced in them was anxiety. Now that's the reality of the coming judgment.

Now let's look at the reassurances for believers. The reassurances for believers. Now the verse around which all of this is revolving is verse four. Look at it with me.

But you are not in darkness brothers for that day to surprise you like a thief. Do you see the reassurance coming in now?

[22 : 59] Do you see what Paul's doing? The first three verses he recognizes that they have questions about this and he says the day of the Lord the day of judgment it's coming like a thief in the night it's coming with sudden destruction it's coming like labor pains on a pregnant woman once it starts it will not stop and those who are subject to his wrath will not escape it and then immediately he says but you brothers you're not in the darkness that day will not surprise you like a thief in the night it's like all the tension is building at this point the tension is building in the first three verses and it's like whoever is reading this letter to the church in Thessalonica at the time that it is delivered to them it's like they can take a collective deep breath now a sigh of relief tension tension tension judgment judgment judgment but but you're safe we're safe notice the language but you he says but you stands in distinct contrast to the people in verse three there's two different groups at play here will

Jesus come again yes will his judgment be devastating yes will anybody escape it yes yes praise God yes the day of the Lord will come upon the people like a thief in the night but it will not affect Christians in the same way the day of the Lord is for those who are in darkness but the Thessalonian Christians were not in darkness Colossians 1 12 to 14 we give thanks to the father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of sins there are two groups of people at work here there are the people who will face his wrath and then there are the people who will face his forgiveness and in verses 5 to 10

Paul issues two reassurances to support the affirmation of salvation for believers the first one is this you are in the light you are in the light Christian hear me this morning you are in the light that day will not come upon you like a thief in the night you're in the light verse 5 for you are all children of the light children of the day were not of the night or of the darkness the day of the Lord is for those in darkness but those who are in Christ are not in darkness they are in the light this is a statement of identity and of one standing before God as a result of that identity those those who trust in Christ stand in the light and there are so many verses we could point to here I want to give you two John 5 12 Jesus said to them I am the light of the world whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life Jesus is the light that brings life to escape the judgment and you are in the light therefore what you face in your future is life 2 Corinthians 4 4 to 6 speaking of unbelievers in their case the God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of

Christ who is the image of God and then he speaks of his preaching of the gospel for what we proclaim is not ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord with ourselves as your servants for Jesus sake and now listen to what Paul says here for God who said quoting Genesis 1 let light shine out of darkness that same God who brought all of this into existence with the power of his word has shown his light into our hearts why to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ Christian you are not of the darkness you are not in the darkness that is not who you are you are in the light and what awaits you is not wrath what awaits you salvation freedom forgiveness if you are in

[28 : 32] Christ the light of God's grace in Jesus has shone in your heart through faith you are a child of the day the coming judgment is for those in darkness but that's not who you are that's not who you are now for those of you who sit in the seat of the Thessalonians your faith is in Christ you've turned from sin you profess faith you're doing what you can but you still have sin and you're not exactly sure you're you're concerned that on that day you won't stand hear my words you are not in!

that day will not surprise you like a thief in the night you're of the light take courage take courage you're in the light now as often as the case in the scriptures the indicative of verse five that they are children of the light is immediately followed by an imperative command or instruction in verses six to eight Paul says so then let us not sleep as others do let us keep awake and be sober for those who

sleep sleep at night those who get drunk are drunk at night but since we belong to the day let us be sober having put on the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet a hope of salvation now this gives us another clue into another likely source of their anxiety why did I fear the arrival of the report card in high school because

I knew I hadn't obeyed my parents and that I deserved their punishment for my disobedience right why might some of the Thessalonians have been anxious about Christ's return because they were children of the light they weren't living like people of the light perhaps some of their lives looked more like those who were in darkness and they knew they were worthy of God's wrath now let's get something clear neither their assurance nor your assurance can rest on any moral or ethical effort that is not the foundation of assurance in this text or in any other text Paul's not insinuating here that their obedience is the basis of their assurance of escaping God's judgment you can be the most moral person in the room and still go to hell Jesus made that clear our assurance rests entirely on our identity in

Christ that we are children of the light not that we are somehow worthy of the light but that we belong to the light now that being said who will ever feel assured as a child of the light when their life is lived in darkness asleep to the things of God intoxicated by the ways of the world and Paul doubles down on this in verse 8 doesn't he just look at verse 8 again since we belong to the day let us be sober having put on the breast plate of faith and love and for a helmet the hope of salvation the imperative is let us be sober but that imperative in verse 8 is built on two other indicatives do you see it but since he says since we belong to the day the participle at the end of the verse having put on that's past tense since you have put on faith love and hope what we saw in faith in Christ love for Christ hope in Christ Paul says since you belong to the light since you belong to Christ by faith because of that he says be sober you're a child of the light live like it he says moral behavior listen moral behavior is not the basis of our assurance it is the result of our assurance you belong to the light live like it now there's ditches on both sides of the road here isn't there we can have full trust that we're in Christ and somehow allow that assurance to let us slip into sinful intentional willing behavior well no that is not right either that's not actually indicative of someone whose heart has been transformed by the gospel of

[33 : 43] Christ right but on the other hand we can be so intent on obeying the imperative that we don't rest our salvation on the indicative some of us get so caught up in this fruit based works based form of evaluating true Christians that it's like we abandon the gospel that our assurance and our salvation is no longer resting in who Christ is and what Christ has done but on my ability to live in the way that he has commanded both are wrong are we to live soberly righteously holy yes but only because we know that our standing before God is at peace and at rest because of what Christ has done and because of who Christ is not because of anything in us second he says you're of the light second you're destined for salvation you're destined now let's just catch up on where we are he says here's the reality of judgment it's going to be terrible it's going to be sudden it's going to be destructive and once it starts you can't escape it that's bad big problem lots of tension and then he relieves the tension and he says but those of you in

Thessalonica you're not of the darkness that day won't surprise you like that it's not going to be the same for you as it will be for them and he and he says let me give you two reasons why first you're in the light you belong to Christ second because you're in the light because you belong to Christ your destiny your destiny determined by God is salvation verse 9 for God has not destined us for wrath but he has destined us to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us so that whether we are awake that is living or asleep that is dead that's a reference back to chapter 4 we might live with him Christian this is amazing this is better than

Red Bull that gives you wings this is awesome you belong to Christ your destiny not self determined but divinely determined is salvation not wrath chapter 1 Paul tells them he's confident that they were chosen of God because of their persevering faith in Christ and here he reminds them that because they're chosen in Christ they have a different destiny than the people in verse 3 they're not destined for wrath but for eternal salvation through Jesus and how is it that Jesus made possible this eternal salvation to which God chosen are destined he tells us in verse 10 he died for us what is this death it is

God's wrath it is God's judgment it is what will be repaid to the people in verse 3 at the return of Christ but he says now remember loved ones he says Christ faced the wrath for us that Jesus died for us means he suffered that wrath so that we will escape it and because of his resurrection we are

confident that he will bring with him at his return all who have believed in him for salvation those who believe who are in Christ are destined to live forever with the Lord Romans 8 is the quintessential text for exactly this point

Romans 8 verse 29 those whom he foreknew he predestined to be conformed to the image of his son in order that he might be the first born among many brothers and those whom he predestined he also called and those whom he called he also justified those whom he justified he also glorified what shall we say to these things if God is for us who can be against us he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also with him graciously give us all things who will bring a charge against God's elect it is God who justifies who is to condemn Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised and is at the right hand of

[39 : 23] God interceding for us oh Christian you are not destined for wrath not because you're unworthy of wrath but because Christ took it for you it always comes back to the gospel doesn't it your assurance for escaping the judgment is not who you are it is who you are in Christ it's not found in what you do it rests!

in what Christ has done for you and if you trust in him you are a child of the light destined for salvation so take courage be assured that's who you are we get to the third part in verse 11 we've seen the reality of judgment we've seen two reassurances for believers and now we see the proper response to Christ salvation how are we to respond to these things Paul gives us another inference he did the same thing in chapter 4 didn't he he gets to the end and he says because of all of this this is what I think you should do and he does the same thing here verse 11 therefore because of all of this encourage one another and build one another up just as you are doing just as you doing just as in 4 13 to 18 Paul closes with an important application so he does it here he wants them to be comforted in their anxiety why because there was no reason for them to fear and based on everything that he's just written he issues two applications for them and for us first we are to encourage one another how with the assurances provided in the gospel provided in this text this means that it's inevitable that some of us will battle with some of the same uncertainties that the Thessalonians experience do not be surprised when you have a day when you just feel uncertain not because your faith has wavered in Christ but because the prospect of the coming judgment perhaps combined with the presence of sin in your own life has caused you to feel uncertain and what will be your help in those moments for another faithful Christian that loves you to say take courage you are not of the darkness that day will not come upon you like a thief in the night you're of the light take courage encourage one another now to be able to encourage one another necessarily means that we must possess a clear understanding of the gospel and we must learn how to communicate it well so that we can indeed encourage one another many of Christians because of a unclear understanding of the gospel have shackled burdened believers all over again with the law or with foolishness no learn the gospel and learn to communicate the gospel well so that you can indeed encourage others second we must build one another up build one another up into what I think in the context of this paragraph we are to build one another up into the spiritual sobriety that is rooted in those gospel assurances we need to help one another live as children of the light and avoid the spiritual apathy and worldly inebriation that is pictured in those who are asleep and those who are drunk at night sanctification we say this all the time I said it in Lakeside Connect this morning sanctification in the Christian life is a community project we need one another but we will only be useful to one another as we're filled with the gospel and with sound doctrine so let us be joyfully sober and continue building one another up in Christ now back in high school when those report cards would eventually come as you might assume that wasn't always a pleasant experience for me the experience was often embarrassment and shame on my part because I understood the disappointment on the part of my parents they often corrected me of course any good parent would but you know what never happened not even one time they never beat me never berated me they never disowned me they never withheld the privileges of being their son that wasn't because

[45 : 15] I was unworthy of their judgment but because I belonged to them and nothing was going to change that now if Jesus comes back today and we would do well to pray that he will because that will be a glorious day if he comes back today there might be some embarrassment for some of us as we acknowledge some disappointment in our Lord and Savior all our works Paul said to the Corinthians will be tested by fire to see if they're burn up like wood hay and stubble!

Or whether they will shine as gold and silver and precious stones! That will be the case for every believer we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ our souls may be saved but our works may be burned up we will answer to him but you know will not happen if you're a Christian you will never be cast out you will not be destroyed you will not be kept back from the privileges of being a child of God God that's not because you are unworthy of his wrath it's because you belong to him because he has made you his own you are safe Jesus said all that the father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me

I will never cast out never not today not on that day the only reason to fear his coming is if you belong to the darkness but the glorious truth of this text and many others is that you don't have to remain in the darkness Jesus is the light come to him trust in him he will save you and you'll be glad when he does eventually come