

Fully Aware

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[0 : 00] And as you're sitting down, please turn to the front of the bulletin, and we're going to begin the sermon and end it this way, too, by reading a collect for the Advent Sundays that we're saying every service in Advent.

And it is a prayer that has everything to do with our passage and arises from it. Let's pray together. Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility, that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to life immortal through him who liveth and reigneth with thee in the Holy Ghost, now and forever.

Amen. Now, I want to have you keep looking at that collect for a moment. Collocks are a gift in our Anglican Church. It's a treasure. They don't take the place of our own prayers, but what they do is they shape them.

And they are prayers that we can say together. And I want you to notice that the prayer reflects the Bible's teaching that we live in an in-between time, a time between two comings of Jesus. We're in the time of this mortal life, that prayer says, when Jesus came to visit us in great humility at Christmas. And he will come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead.

[1 : 39] It is a time, as David started the service, of the light coming into darkness. So it's a time of spiritual darkness and the light of Christ existing at the same time.

John, in his first letter, says that the darkness, because Jesus has come, the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

That describes the age that we live in right now. And there is a strangeness about living in a time where there is both spiritual darkness and spiritual light.

It's a time when Christians are constantly needing to cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light that we prayed about. But the big question is, how do we do this?

How do we cast off darkness? How do we put on the armor of light? How do we prepare ourselves to not only celebrate the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, but to prepare for him coming at any moment as judge in his glorious majesty?

[2 : 46] Well, our passage today is a great help to us. And according to my Bible, it actually is on page 987. You can find it there. Paul shows us in this passage that the day of the Lord is key for us to be prepared, for us to live in this in-between time.

Because Paul shows us that the day of the Lord is not something esoteric, something that's not connected with our everyday life. He shows us that it is deeply relevant to our relationships, relevant to what we think, what we do, our personal future.

It actually touches every aspect of our lives. And we'll look at this passage in two parts. And I'll divide it in that way.

The first part is verses 1 through 5 that reveal the spiritual condition of the world. And the second part says that the day of the Lord defines our life.

So let's look at verses 1 through 5. They tell us that the day of the Lord reveals spiritual condition. Now, Paul starts right out by saying that the day of the Lord is something that you cannot predict or control.

[3 : 57] This is something that is completely God's initiative. It's in his hands. And he says in verse 1, Concerning times and seasons, brothers and sisters, you have no need to have anything written to you.

And Jesus says the same thing. Concerning that day, no one knows. Not even the angels nor the Son, but the Father only. But human nature wants to have control over our future.

And the best example of this is a man called Harold Camping. And you guys may know of him, have heard of him. May 21st, he predicted, would be the end of the world.

And the first day of the day of judgment, I should say. And October 21st would be the final end of the world. Now, what he did was he and his corporation called Family Radio spent \$100 million on an information campaign.

And I looked at some of the billboards of this information campaign in various cities of the United States on the internet. And they said this. They said, Judgment Day, May 21st, 2011.

[5 : 03] The Bible guarantees it. And these billboards were everywhere and radio ads and so forth. And so it was all over the news. But of course, Camping emerged from his home on May 22nd saying he was flabbergasted.

And he was looking for answers. And he revised his prediction to say that it was a spiritual rapture. October 21st would be the final day, or October 21st would be the final physical judgment. Now, thankfully, Camping has now come to the conclusion that no one can predict the end of the world. And that's a very good thing, but it took \$100 million to get there. Now, the thing that you may not know is that Camping and a number of other people who predicted the end of the world incorrectly were jointly awarded an Ig Nobel Prize.

I don't know if you've heard of that before. Ig Nobel Prize. And it was in September 2011. Just recently, they were awarded this for teaching the world to be careful when making mathematical assumptions and calculations.

Now, that mistake of Camping is a teaching for us because the Bible is consistently clear here and in the Gospel that the day of the Lord will be sudden.

[6 : 22] It is not something that we can control or prepare exactly what our lives will be. It is not something that we can be completely comfortable with. And if you look at verse 2, it says, you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

And of course, thieves do not advertise when they are coming. In our first year of marriage, I was awakened at 3 a.m. by Catherine, who said, I've just got to the bathroom and a light has gone on in our living room.

And I woke up and I said, are you sure? She said, yes, somebody must be in there. Well, when you wake this way, your heart starts beating very, very quickly and your adrenaline starts rushing.

And so we decided we had to do something about this. So I gathered all my courage and I grabbed a shoe and I rushed out into the living room.

And what did I meet? The floor lamp was on and that was it. And I called back. I said, there's nothing here. It's just the lamp.

[7 : 37] And Catherine said, are you sure? I said, yes, I am. And it turned out that there was a short in the, an electric short. David wasn't there. There was a short that caused the lamp to go on unexpectedly.

Never happened since. But that was the cause of it. Now, the good thing about that situation is that Catherine commended me for my bravery.

So, so it was all worth it. But we, we, we, we laughed about it because of course, why would a thief turn on the light?

And, and, and why would he advertise that he was there? Of course, he wouldn't. But like, and like a real thief, the day of the Lord will take place suddenly.

Whether, whether it is today or it is after we die, it will happen without warning. Without flashes going off that say it's going to happen pretty soon or no billboards.

[8 : 42] It will happen. And so that is the nature of that day. Now, Paul uses a thief for another reason. Not just because it will be very sudden, but also because thieves take away.

And verse 3 tells us that the day of the Lord will take away all peace and security that do not arise out of Jesus Christ. It will take away all peace and security that we create that doesn't come from God.

And that's why it says, well, people are saying there is peace and security. Then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman and they will not escape.

Well, that, that describes, doesn't it, our country and the culture of our city as well. We live in a place of peace and security, especially when we look at the rest of the world.

And we trust in that peace and security. Our culture often says, maybe not explicitly all the time, but implicitly, who needs God? We can be happy.

[9 : 49] We can be safe. We can be moral. We can be self-fulfilled people without him. And because I have my friends and my family and my job and my investments, which are decent, well, God must be irrelevant here.

But verse 3 tells us that a life that depends on peace and security from anything other than God will face destruction on the day of the Lord. It's a sobering verse.

That word destruction is important because it doesn't mean annihilation. It means that God will tear down everything in our lives that is raised up against God and his mighty will.

And Jesus talks about this himself. The favorite passage for my boys growing up is the story of the wise man who built the house on the rock and the foolish man who built the house on sand.

And I'm sure it is because they love to hear about a house that comes crashing down. They're boys that love to see buildings go down. But Jesus was talking about the day of the Lord when he told that parable.

[10 : 59] If you remember in Jesus' stories, both houses experienced the same fierce hurricane with wind and rain and flooding. But the wise man stood firm, the wise man's house, and the foolish man's house fell down.

And Jesus is very clear. He says, great was the fall of that house. He describes complete and utter destruction. And he emphasizes it.

And Jesus said that everyone who hears my word and does it is like the wise man who built his house on a rock. But everyone who hears and does not do my will will be like the foolish man who builds on the sand and has his house destroyed.

There's the sobering aspect of the day of the Lord that it will reveal whose life is built on Jesus and whose is not. And sadly, there will be people on the day of the Lord who will experience a sudden and awful realization that Jesus is Lord.

And that in him is the only place to find true peace and true security. And yet they have a life that opposes him and cannot stand before him.

[12 : 15] It must crumble. And that is a revealing verse because it describes the spiritual condition of every one of us here without the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Without Jesus' loving rescue, every one of us would also experience that awful realization on the day of the Lord. But that is why verses 4 and 5 are so wonderful.

They tell us who we are in Christ. They tell us the results of the good news of Jesus. It says this. It says, But you, you know, in contrast, you are not in darkness, brothers and sisters, for that day to surprise you like a thief.

For you are all children of light. You're children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. You see, these verses tell us that there is a fundamental spiritual divide in the world because of Jesus.

You are either in spiritual darkness or you are children of the light, the light of Jesus. And when we hear that, we might say, why is that good?

[13 : 24] What is wonderful about Jesus dividing people? Well, the reason it is good is because the world is united. All of us at one time were reunited in spiritual darkness.

And according to John 1, Jesus came into the world as the true light which enlightens everyone.

And by God's powerful grace, he takes us out of that awful union in spiritual darkness.

And he makes us his children, children of light. We cross that divide. We are no longer of the night or of darkness. And he creates a new people who know the living God and his forgiveness.

They know his love and his grace and his truth. And they know that they will see Jesus one day as their savior and rescuer. And so the day of the Lord is not a surprise when it comes.

We just don't know when. But the fact of it is something that we look for. Peter describes Christians in this way in 1 Peter 2.9. He says, you are a chosen race.

[14 : 27] You're a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession. That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light.

Why did God choose us to come from darkness into light? Why did he choose us to go across that divide? Was it to congratulate ourselves or say, it's wonderful there's a divide?

No. It is to proclaim the excellencies of Jesus to the world. Excellencies is a great word for the gospel. It's a word we don't use anymore.

But this is what we are meant to be about at St. John's. You and I belong to Jesus together in this congregation so that we will proclaim Jesus and his good news.

That's how Jesus calls the world to himself. That's how he pulls the world across this divide from darkness towards God to being his children.

[15:24] And if you think about it, it is the testimony that each of you have as well. That God has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

And, you know, our prayer and our mission at St. John's is that God would give us grace here as a congregation. That he would call many out of darkness into his marvelous light through us. That's what our church is all about. And really that brings us to the application of the day of the Lord to our everyday life. The second part of this wonderful passage.

Because not only does the day of the Lord reveal the spiritual condition of humanity. That day shapes our life today. Every day. Look at verse 5.

In verse 5, Paul says, You are children of light and children of the day. Now, Paul is saying there that we resemble the light.

[16:22] Children resemble their parents. And this is very revealing to me when I see my boys behave towards each other and one another. And sometimes it is a bit uncomfortable when I see that.

But Paul says, You are children of the light. You resemble the light of Jesus. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. He is making us like him.

But Paul also says, You are children of the day. And when he says that, He's not repeating himself. He is saying, You have the character of the day of the Lord in your lives.

If you believe in Jesus. And we are meant to shape our priorities around that day. So that the certainty that we will see Jesus in glory as our judge.

Determines how I speak to others. How I use my gifts and my talents and my money. It determines how I spend my time and how I relate to my family. How I make decisions in my home life.

[17:21] And how I conduct my business. All of the areas of our lives change when we trust that we will see Jesus as our judge on the day of the Lord.

Everything changes. We are children of that day. My favorite part of the Grey Cup game, which was lots of fun to watch last Sunday afternoon, was right after the BC Lions won, actually.

So it was after the game. And they had the interviews. Wally Buono, the coach of the BC Lions, was interviewed as he held his little four-year-old grandson.

And it was a great moment. He was asked all the usual questions about the game and so forth, which he answered. But then the interviewer wanted to be a little bit more personal. And she asked him, You know, what have you learned from this season?

Where you started out with five losses in a row and things went so well at the end and so forth. And he smiled and he said, First of all, you have to be humble. And he said, Secondly, you have to give thanks to our good Lord Jesus Christ.

[18:25] He gave me a lot of strength and wisdom through this time. And it was wonderful to hear that. And unexpected for me. It was wonderful to hear because on one of the most important days of his professional life, he acknowledged that Jesus is preeminent in his life.

And he actually shapes his professional life as well. But not only that, he was really saying that Jesus shapes his personal life. Because there is his four-year-old son hearing his grandfather say that he learned to thank the Lord Jesus Christ in his work, in the things that he went through that year.

And his son soaked that up on the biggest day of his grandfather's career. And I think this is a great example of how a child of the day of the Lord lives.

The day when they will see Jesus is the fundamental reality of their life. From the best day of their life to the very worst. In their professional life and in their personal life as well.

That day of seeing Jesus is what everything is shaped by. Now as we think of what it means to be a child of the day, verses 6 through 8 is a wake-up call.

[19:42] And I think that we need this wake-up call in verses 6 through 8. And it starts with a warning. It says in verse 6, Let us not sleep as others do.

Let us not sleep. And now what this is saying is that clearly, even though Thessalonians were growing in their faith, and many things were good happening in this church, it's a very happy letter in a lot of ways, they were tempted to become sleepy Christians.

Let us not sleep as others, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night. Christians are tempted to be spiritually groggy and sleepy.

And what he means by that word, being sleepy, is not being aware of Jesus and his presence in your life. It can also mean not being clear about his will, so that you fall into disobeying him. It can mean not being ambitious for what Jesus wants for the world, wants in this world as well. And it can mean taking on the values of the world that are spiritually dark and really kind of muddying our vision of who Jesus is and his central place in our life.

[20 : 55] And I think these are the things that the colic means when we pray that God will give us grace to cast off the works of darkness. You know, it's saying, God, help us not to be sleepy Christians.

Help us to throw those things off which make us spiritual, sleepy people. And instead, Paul says in verse 8, because we belong to the day, be sober.

Be sober. And that's a very important word. If you look at that in verse 8, it says, since we belong to the day, let us be sober. Well, what does that mean to be sober? Having put on the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.

Now, this is an important verse for us because this is what Advent's calling us to, to be spiritually sober people. How do you do that in practice? Well, Paul gives us the reason, I think, right at the beginning of the letter.

He has just said that it means putting on the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. What that means in practice is if you go to the next, go a page before, page 986, right at the beginning of the letter, verse 3, he uses those same words of faith and love and hope.

[22 : 13] He says this, he says, remembering before our God and Father your works of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

So he's saying that faith shows itself. It causes work of us actively serving God and serving his people.

It means giving time and energy and resources in God's kingdom. And this is happening in our own church. God has been gently and powerfully moving us as a congregation into this work of faith.

And I think part of that work in the future will involve the work of prayer. And this is a bit of a trailer of what will happen in the future, but we are going to have an Ebenezer Sunday service on January 8th.

And it will kick off a year of thanking God for how he has taken us through the last years, what he has done in our life as a church, and also praying about what God has for us in the future with thankful hearts as well.

[23 : 17] This is the work of faith, that prayer. And it is very important to the life of our congregation. Peter also tells us, not only does faith work, but love labors.

And there is a work to love as well. It is not feeling warmly towards each other. Paul is saying it is a dedicated action, a labor for one another in Jesus' name that involves encouraging and build each other up.

Putting on love, which is that armor, piece of armor, means saying I will go on working for Jesus. If I trust him, I will want to serve him. If I love him, I will want to obey him.

And those acts of love, that life of love that is our labor, will also be the life of the future resurrection with Jesus as well. It is preparing us for that day.

And finally, he says that putting on the helmet of hope means steadfastness. Literally, it means bearing up in difficult circumstances. Because of the certain hope of the Lord Jesus Christ that we have in him.

[24 : 24] Now, I want to close by saying that many of you are facing very challenging things. You're also facing wonderful things. In all of this, we have a temptation to lose hope. But Paul spells out for us what it means to be strengthened by hope in Jesus and to persevere in our hope.

He spells that out in verses 9 and 10, if you go back to 988. He says this, Here is the substance of our hope. 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.

Well, that's the key verse in this passage. That sums it all up for us. It is clear that there is a day of wrath against all evil and all that opposes God.

But that same day is a day of salvation for us. Because Jesus, in his deep love, by dying for you on a cross, he has given the gift that whether you live or die, you will live with him.

And nothing changes that fundamental truth. Because it's based on what Jesus did on the cross, that is the guarantee that you will live with Jesus Christ.

