

Only a Matter of Time

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[0 : 00] Let us pray. Father God, we do give you thanks and praise for you speak to us.

And we pray that you would speak to us now through your most precious word and that you would teach us and transform us that we might celebrate the coming of your Son.

We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. We are looking at 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 together, verses 1 through 11.

Just in case you didn't get a chance to open your Bibles, please do that now, page 192. We're going to have a look at that together. Page 192.

It is the year 999 and the date is the 31st of December and it is late in the evening, New Year's Eve.

[1 : 12] And you're at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. And you can see there standing Pope Sylvester II with his arms raised up, ready to welcome Jesus at his return.

People wearing sackcloth and ashes and they are falling to their knees as the clock climbed towards 12 midnight. When that fatal hour struck, wrote Richard Ordose in AD 1000, living on the brink of the apocalypse, the crowd remained transfixed, barely daring to breathe, not a few dying from the fright, giving up their ghosts then and there.

Amazing, isn't it? We're having a New Year's dinner and service this year hosted by Neil. I don't think that you'll expect to see this kind of thing happening. Hope not.

People have been trying to work out exactly when and where Jesus will return for a very, very long time. This is not the first and it's certainly not the last story. You may remember there was quite a fuss made over 1988.

Many people thought that Jesus would return in 1998 one book was called 88 Reasons Why Jesus Will Return in 1998. I think it was meant to be September 11, but that came and then I think they changed it to October 5 and we're still here.

[2 : 41] It amazes me that people speculate in this kind of way, so much so that they might give up the ghost in anticipation of that moment. They should realise that Paul was writing to them as well and to us when he said in verse 1, Now concerning the times and seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you.

Why? Because Jesus himself had said, But concerning that day or the hour, no one knows, not the angels in heaven, not even the Son, but only the Father.

To be honest, when I was a young teenager, concerning that day, I was in the far too concerned camp about what minute of what day he might return.

This week after preparing this passage for you, I think I've realised that I'm now in the not nearly concerned enough about the very fact that he will one day return. And it's easy to be, isn't it, living in this world, day after day.

And I'm not sure which is worse, really, to be too caught up on which moment it might happen or to be not concerned about the fact that it will happen. And either way, this passage addresses both of us here.

[4 : 02] As we read in verse 2, For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. It wasn't so long ago that my wife Sarah was having dinner with her family.

It was a raucous dinner in the Buchanan household and laughter and stories were going to and fro. And then Sarah said she remembered looking across the table and she saw her older brother David, his ears.

He lifted his ears and turned his head and listened. And he quietly stood up from the table, walked to the cupboard. He grabbed a baseball bat. He started down the stairs toward his bedroom.

He steps into his bedroom. And there is a thief, unannounced. Taking. He was planning to fly out the next day and there was his pile of money that he'd saved, his passport, his tickets, and the thief had them all bundled up and he was on his way out the window.

That's how thieves are. They don't announce themselves. They come. They're sudden. They're unexpected. And that was this thief. Sudden. Unexpected.

[5 : 10] They don't tend to call ahead. Perhaps this one should have. Sarah's brother is 6'5", at least 200 pounds, pretty strong guy, barreling down the stairs with a baseball bat.

His other brother and father, 6'3 and 6'8 respectively, and they all bundle into this room. The thief probably found that they were as sudden and unexpected as he was.

But that's the point of verse 2, isn't it? Thieves come. They come unannounced. They don't write or call ahead. They come. Their coming is sudden. Their coming is unfortunate and unexpected.

Verse 3, while people are saying there is peace and security, then sudden destruction will come upon them as labour pains upon a pregnant woman.

It was actually this year, April 18th, around 10.30am, and Sarah and I were sitting in church together, listening to the sermon, and she looked at me. She looked a little bit troubled.

[6 : 12] She said something was happening with her belly. It was Oscar. He was announcing his intentions to arrive. Sarah was about to have a baby, and I felt like I was about to have kittens.

Many emotions, many emotions came upon me, chiefly, I think, fear and shock. I didn't know when it was going to happen, but I guess I should have known that it had to happen eventually.

I should have been more prepared than I was. But I think that's the point of verse 3. It's sudden. It's unpredictable. Yet it is inevitable.

And these are very real pictures, aren't they? Most of us can relate to them. A thief in the night, labour pains coming upon a pregnant woman. I think they're very real pictures so that we might grasp hold of an even greater reality.

that the day will come. If there's a first point, this is it. The day of our Lord's return will come. Sudden, unexpected, unpredictable, but very much inevitable.

[7 : 25] He will come. This day is about our salvation at the return of Christ, but is by no means salvation alone. In verse 3 again, while people are saying there is peace and security, then sudden destruction will come upon them as labour pains upon a pregnant woman and they will not escape.

The day of the Lord is a concept that's heavily featured throughout the Old Testament from Amos on. Primarily understood to speak of a day of judgement perhaps, as Peter speaks of in his second letter, the day of judgement which is coming.

And the idea of destruction there in verse 3 is enlarged upon in Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians. In fact, it's on the same page. Page 193, chapter 1, halfway through verse 7.

When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus and they will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.

A complete separation from God and all things good. described by one as the thought of utter and hopeless ruin, the loss of all that gives worth to existence.

[8 : 59] And in verse 3, this destruction is followed up with the phrase, they will not escape. Very emphatically, it couldn't be a stronger statement, they will by no means escape.

Judgment and salvation, always two sides of the same coin in scripture. Judgment and salvation. One day, everyone involved.

I don't know about you, but when I was growing up, I used to watch lots of movies about the return of Christ, quite fascinated by them. And there was one movie called A Distant Thunder, and I think I remember a scene from it where a certain person comes home from wherever they were, comes into the house and they come into the kitchen and the mix master's on, but mother's not there and this person goes out into the backyard and the lawnmower's going, but father's not pushing it.

And this is the moment in the movement where it's realized that Jesus has come back and this person has missed out. I used to have nightmares about that. And I remember coming home from school one day.

I walked through the living room into the kitchen and there was the mix master and it was going, but mum wasn't there. I went out into the backyard, the lawnmower wasn't going, but the mix master was just enough.

[10 : 23] If I had a heart condition, it would have been all over right there. For I really thought that I'd missed out. But there's a second point. This is it. No one will miss out.

No one will escape. Here is a day of destruction, a day of salvation. Some not wanting to escape. The rest not being able to.

For that is not us, verse 4. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to overtake you, to surprise you like a thief. You see, there is a way in which we will be surprised, but it is fundamentally different in kind and in proportion.

We don't know the times or the seasons. We will be surprised. For those in darkness who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, it will be a deathly shocking.

Not the timing of the occasion, but the very fact of the occasion. And that is why they'll be saying right up to the moment, verse 3, there is peace and security.

[11 : 29] For us it will be surprised, like being surprised by the visit of a long-lost friend. For them the surprise, the woeful surprise of a thief in the night.

Following the contrast of surprises, in verses 4 to 7, our lives are contrast. Four sets of opposites.

Day and night. Light and darkness. Alert and asleep. Sober and drunk. The way we live is evidence of what we believe.

There is an obvious moral tone through these opposites. Our beliefs about the Lord Jesus Christ produce a distinctive lifestyle. We are prepared for this day.

The second point is that no one will escape. No one will miss it. The third is that we are children of this day. We are children of the day. And in these contrasts, three exhortations come out based on who we are.

[12 : 36] Verse 5. For you are children of the light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. And so the first exhortation, verse 6.

So then let us not sleep as others do. The second, the same verse. Let us keep awake and be sober. And the third, verse 8. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober.

Paul is saying to us that waiting for Jesus means living disciplined lives. Discipline now morally. Discipline towards that day. It means actively expecting his return and not getting sidetracked.

For we are children of that day. And it's good to be reminded for I think it's very easy to forget. We live in such a beautiful part of this world, this old world.

Beautiful and safe and stable, at least around here. And we're wealthy. We're well established. We're set up. In verse 3, peaceful and secure, that's particularly Vancouver, I think.

[13 : 44] I remember when Oscar was still in his mum's belly, I used to speak to him. I preached the gospel to him once or twice. But I used to speak to him more commonly, hello in there.

It's daddy out here. There's a big world out here you're coming into. And imagine if he could speak back to me.

A big world, I'm not sure. I'm kind of comfortable in here. Everything's kind of supplied. Online even, my food. This is the world I know.

I could do with a little bit more room, but this is good enough. I know this world. I'm set up. I'm established. I think I'd like to just stay here a little while longer. Then he served his eviction notice.

I'm tempted to think like that, about this world and the world to come. Because I live in such a beautiful part of this world. I'm kind of comfortable, established.

[14 : 48] It's easy to forget that that day will come. Sudden, unexpected, unpredictable, yet very much inevitable.

And we are called to orient our lives toward that day, not this one. quote, the rector, the center of gravity in the New Testament is the second coming of Christ.

And if that's the center of gravity within the New Testament, it should also be the center of gravity in our lives. Our lives oriented towards the end of history, the world to come, the return of our Lord Jesus Christ who will bring it.

Our lives are to be very different, vastly different. And the real question of this passage is not when, but how. It is not when will Christ return.

It is in light of his return, in light of the wrath, which we have been spared, in light of the salvation, which we have been appointed, in light of the sure hope, which we have been given, in light of the world to come, which is ours.

[16 : 01] How should we live? In light of that day, how should we live now? This is the question of this passage. It was remarkable to me when I first visited Sarah's mum after she had been given the news that she was terminally ill.

It was remarkable to me how she lived, how intentionally and deliberately she lived. How her perspective on reality crystallized.

And the way that she spent her money chain, and her values changed, and her priorities changed. And I think that is a great model for us in light of that impending day.

Christ's return. Paul says that we should live very intentionally, very deliberately. Our lives live toward that day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns.

For we have, verse 8, put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. The gospel, which looks back and looks forward, and is loved from beginning to end, a real and substantial hope.

[17 : 10] Verse 9, 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.

I think Hebrews captures it well when it says, Let us consider how to stir one another up into love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another, and all the more, as we see the day dawning.

Let us be encouraging one another, in this gospel of the one who died for us, in the certain hope of his return.

Let us encourage one another, over morning tea in the Trendle Lounge, over lunch with our family and our friends, in your letters, in your emails, in your Bible studies, in your prayers, at all times, in all ways.

[18 : 18] I have heard a phrase many times, perhaps you have heard it, that someone is so heavenly minded, that they are of no earthly use. And I have never met anyone like that.

Ever. C.S. Lewis is much closer to Mark, when he says, It is since Christians have largely ceased, to think of the other world, that they have become so ineffective, in this one.

Let that not be so of me. Let that not be so of you. May it be that our lives, and our hopes, our dreams, our aspirations, our imaginations, are caught up in that day.

Christ's glorious return. Encourage your friends, now, to live in light of that day. Pray that they would encourage you, to do the same.

For we are children, of that day. Let me encourage you, St. John's. There are many signs to me, that at least in some way, we as a congregation, are living in light of that day.

[19 : 29] One that stands out to me, at this present moment, is the fact that we have a budget, of 1.4 million dollars. We are investing annually, at this date, 1.4 million dollars.

For that day. We invest 1.4 million dollars, for ministry, which is oriented, towards that day. The proclamation of the gospel, which brings people, from darkness, into his glorious light.

Perhaps, as we continue, to live as children, of that day, we can actually, make that budget, and then some. We are children, of that day. And I would encourage you, to pray for our tidzo, that we might raise up, many, able gospel preachers, that would preach, the gospel, that takes people, from darkness, into his glorious light.

Veronica, Maranatha, come Lord Jesus, come. Amen.