



DESERT VIEW BIBLE CHURCH

SERIES: WE BELIEVE HOPE • 2/19/2023 •

MAIN POINT

Believers are to live faithfully and expectantly in anticipation of Christ's return.

INTRODUCTION

For those who have planned or taken part in a wedding, how much preparation was involved? How many people combined their efforts?

How does our preparation for an event mirror how excited we are about it?

Think of all the events we attend in our lives: weddings, graduation ceremonies, birthday parties, corporate events, etc. Many man-hours go to preparing for these events. Anyone who has ever planned a wedding can attest to the weeks and months of preparation that lead up to an event of a few hours. We gladly take the time because of the significance of the occasion. The Bible speaks clearly that there is a quickly approaching day when Christ will return for His people. It is the responsibility

of every follower of Christ to anticipate and make their hearts and lives ready for that day.

UNDERSTANDING

Jesus' return to earth fascinates some people, while to others it is of little consequence. Sometimes Christians can get so intrigued that they become absorbed in wanting to figure out all the details. Other believers may not ever think about Jesus' return at all. In Paul's answer to the Thessalonians questions, he taught that both perspectives are off base. Believers should eagerly await Christ's return in such a way that motivates faithful living in the present.

READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-3.

The Thessalonians likely asked their question out of anxiety. Why do you think people get worried about the second coming? Is worry an appropriate response?

What facts do we know about His return? Where else does Scripture teach on this event?

Which is harder for you—to be confident of the fact of Jesus' return or to remain blissfully ignorant of the exact time and circumstances of His return? Why?

Questions about the details of Jesus' return are not new because even the earliest disciples asked these questions (Acts 1:7). The words used for times and seasons refer to dates and circumstance. Many people throughout history have looked at the state of the world around them and assumed Jesus will return. When will He return? What events will let us know Jesus is coming? Jesus told His disciples that even He did not

know these details Himself (Matt. 24:36), but only the Father. It is not productive to try and figure out what is known only to God.

What is the day of the Lord? How did the Old Testament prophets use this term? How did Paul?

What does the analogy of Jesus coming “like a thief in the night” mean? How would you describe the behavior of a thief? Where else does this imagery appear in the New Testament?

The day of the Lord is used all throughout the Old Testament to refer to the day when God would save and justify the faithful and punish the unrighteous. Paul uses it to refer to the second coming. The imagery of a thief is not uncommon in the New Testament and is often used to describe a sudden and unexpected moment. Though for the people of God this should be a welcomed event because it represents the day of their salvation. Its sudden nature means that the specific time and date are not something believers are to give much thought to.

What is the danger in not being prepared for the day of the Lord? What is the danger in building your life around peace and security?

Who are the people Paul refers to in verse 3? Why do they believe they have peace and security? Do you know people like this?

Paul uses another metaphor of a woman in labor pains. What does this add to our understanding of the Lord’s return?

Jesus’ return will be like labor pains on a pregnant woman—an experience that often begins suddenly and from which there is no escape. The people Paul referred to are unbelievers—those who have failed to see the importance of the day of the Lord because they have chased comforts in this life. Jesus urged His disciples to be ready because they will not expect His coming (Matt. 24:24).

READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:4-7.

Paul reassured the Thessalonians that they are not like those in the darkness. Believers stand in contrast to people in verse 3 who will be swept away in judgment at Jesus' return. For Christ followers, Jesus' coming will not be like the arrival of a thief who destroys the owner's possessions (even though the time of His coming may surprise us).

In these verses, how does Paul use imagery of light and darkness? What activities mark the day and night activities seen in these verses? Consider making a quick list.

What does sleep represent? What might a Christian do to ensure he/she is "awake"?

Christians should never be surprised that the rest of humanity indulges in immorality. The desired course is to stay awake, asking the Lord to keep us vibrant and alert in order to steer clear of spiritual and moral temptations surrounding us. In our moral and spiritual behavior, Christ's followers are already as different from others as daylight is from dark. Being ready for Christ's return means realizing we belong to the daytime and that our behavior is to reflect spiritual alertness, not spiritual laziness.

READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:8-11.

A Roman soldier was instantly recognized by his breastplate and helmet. What traits make a follower of Christ instantly recognizable?

How do soldiers prepare for physical battle? How do Christians prepare for spiritual battle?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What are some practical ways we encourage each other to live for Christ as we wait for His return?

Who are the people in your life who are seeking peace and security? How can you pray for them and reach out to them to make them ready for the day of the Lord?

Accountability is one way that Christians “keep awake” and progress in godly character. Have you ever considered forming accountability with other believers? What might this look like in your own life?

PRAYER

Ask God to help you convey to those who do not know Jesus the urgency of responding to the gospel. confess to God the things that distract you from living in expectation of Him.

COMMENTARY

1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

5:1. Although Paul was still writing concerning the coming of Christ, he shifted his focus away from how the Lord will come to what that coming will mean for different people. Evidently the Thessalonians had been taught concerning the return of Christ, for Paul began by saying that “about times and dates we do not need to write to you.” He then went on to reinforce what he must have talked with them about.

The “dates” and “times” can be translated as epochs and crises. This phrase refers to a time period and to the conditions of a particular time. Both are secrets, hidden with God (Acts 1:7), not known by anyone else, even the angels or Jesus (Matt. 24:36).

5:2. Paul declared that the Lord will come like a thief in the night. This possibly refers to the “times” in verse 1. The imagery is taken from Jesus’ teaching in Luke 12:39-40: “If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” The suddenness and surprise of Christ’s coming was well understood. A thief does not call up and ask if he can stop by at 2:30 in the morning. He just comes when most people are sleeping.

5:3. Paul expanded on Christ’s return by using the imagery of a pregnant woman’s labor pains. Just when everyone is thinking things are fine, when no one seems worried or concerned, when life is going well, then Christ appears. But the contrast is even more dramatic. People are saying and thinking peace and safety, while destruction is actually what happens.

The people who will be caught by surprise are the unbelievers, the great masses of people throughout the world. It is not clear whether they are feeling secure and well economically and politically, or whether they feel “safe” spiritually, believing there is no God to worry about. Whatever the source of their security, it will be suddenly and irrevocably shattered: they will not escape.

The destruction is not physical death, but the spiritual separation and judgment that Christ brings. Christ the judge has come at last, and the verdict is hopeless ruin, the loss of all that gives purpose. Like a woman in labor, the judgment comes upon the unbelieving world suddenly, inevitably, with pain. There is no reversing the matter.

5:4. Paul then began to discuss the implications of Christ’s return for the believer before His great coming. To the unbeliever, Jesus will come like a thief in the night, but for the believer, His return will come as no surprise, nor will He come like a robber who destroys the owner’s possessions. Those who believe are not in darkness.

In the Bible, darkness typically refers to moral or spiritual blindness, disobedience, or separation. This sphere of darkness is where the unbelieving world lives. Paul's contrast is sharp: you (the Thessalonians and all believers) are not living in unbelief, spiritual darkness, moral confusion: "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Col. 1:13). For believers, Christ's coming is nothing to fear.

5:5. Christians are all sons of the light ... sons of the day. Having just said what Christians are not, Paul asserted what they are. The contrast is bold and unmistakable. Unlike an unbeliever, a Christian is in relationship with the light, with God and Christ. Not only that, but the Christian lives in moral and spiritual enlightenment. His life and understanding are affected by his faith in Christ. To draw the contrast with bold strokes, Paul again stated, we do not belong to the night or to the darkness. There can be no confusion. The Christian is different in life and destiny from the unbeliever.

5:6. Now the reasonable conclusion: Being in the light, having been rescued from the darkness, looking to a future with God, not being subject to his wrath—these should make a difference in how we live. Paul urged them to not be like others, who are asleep. The comparison is most likely to the unbeliever.

Falling asleep is a picture of what can happen to us spiritually, ethically, or morally if we are not watchful. We simply drift off. Drowsiness begins, we become comfortable, our hearts become insensitive. Spiritual drowsiness slowly paralyzes the spirit. The person who was once vibrant and wide awake in following Christ can become lethargic and lazy about issues of the spirit.

As you drive down the road and your eyelids become heavy, it is best to open a window, turn up the radio, or pull over for a rest. Spiritually, at the first sign of sleepiness, when church becomes a bit boring, or prayer drops off a bit and you do not seem to care as much—make some corrections. At the very least, ask God to renew your heart, open your spirit to His renewing work, and find accountability with another believer. Falling asleep at the wheel can have disastrous results; so can falling asleep spiritually. We are to be alert and self-controlled. To be alert is the opposite of being asleep. An alert person is aware, sensitive to life around him, and morally and spiritually awake.

5:7. Paul reflected back to his analogy of night and day. He had already defined those outside of Christ as being of the night, and those whose faith is in Christ as being of

the day (v. 5). Remembering that Christians are of the day, he emphasized the need for readiness and alertness by reminding the readers that sleepiness and drunkenness belong to habits of the night. These behaviors should not characterize those of us who are of the day.

5:8. Paul then turned to one of his favorite metaphors—armor (Eph. 6:13-17)—to describe the readiness, seriousness, and combatant qualities of a Christian. We are to have on the breastplate of faith and love. These two virtues, like the breastplate, protect the heart. Faith guards it within, keeping us in close relationship with Christ. Love guards our hearts in our outward behavior toward others, keeping us pure and expressive of the spiritual vitality within.

Along with this, we are to keep on the helmet of the hope of salvation. Our head is the control center of our life; it processes our thoughts and emotions; it analyzes life. The certainty of our salvation, when Christ comes for us (as described by Paul in 1 Thess. 4:14-17), protects our thinking from being overwhelmed by the evil around us. Hope is certainty, not wishful thinking. Christ will come and we shall live with him forever. This reality guards us in times of persecution, temptation, weariness, and all other dangers that come from living in a hostile environment.

5:9. God has appointed us to salvation, not wrath. This is a continuation in thought from verse 8. Our salvation is certain; there can be no wavering on the issue. God appointed, or destined, us to gain salvation. He has offered us the means to grace, and we must exercise determined and persevering faith to see salvation realized in fullness when Christ appears.

In the same way, God did not appoint, or destin, us to suffer His wrath. Wrath is the judgment of God upon unbelief. For the Christian, there is no fear of Christ's appearing: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

5:10. According to Paul, the life of the believer is secure, determined, safe in he hands of God. Christ died so that whether "awake or asleep, we may live together with Him." Paul's use of the "asleep" metaphor goes back to its usage in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, referring to death, not moral failure as in 5:6-7. Christians who die, "sleep" in the sense that it is not the end. One day the trumpet of God will arouse the dead to bodily transformation.

5:11. This assurance of salvation, of transformation into the image of Christ, should encourage us. As we are encouraged, we must continually talk about it and remind one another of our future, so that we do not grow weary or lose heart in the spiritual battles that rage. Every Christian has a responsibility to encourage others in the faith. In an age that is prone to criticism and fault-finding, the same fault-finding attitude can creep into the church. It can become natural to talk about others or critique their performance instead of examining our own hearts or encouraging others toward godliness.

While encouragement inspires us to keep on track spiritually, building each other up deals with investing in others. We should add to other people in such a way that they will be spiritually stronger. In this way, we encourage maturity and fortification of character. We need to look upon all persons as those for whom Christ died. They are eternal soul-spirits just as valuable as we are. We have a responsibility to encourage them to remain faithful and growing until the end.