

Prepared for Jesus' Coming

1Thessalonians 5:1-11

How many people here have ever been to a wedding?

I've been to a number over the years and I have been involved to varying degrees.

I'm very happy to say I was the groom at a wedding, I've been the best man, a groomsman, I've been the AV guy, and on occasion I've been the pastor performing the ceremony.

I have noticed that most of the weddings I have been a part of entail a good bit of preparation.

A venue has to be selected, people need to be chosen for the various roles in the ceremony, clothes need to be chosen, a menu decided upon for the reception, music, decorations, flowers, a photographer, and the list goes on.

As time consuming as all of those things are, that is only part of the equation.

If the couple to be married is wise they will also be seeking to prepare themselves for being married.

They will seek the council of friends, family, and mentors.

They will turn to the Scriptures and seek out God's design for marriage and family.

They will concern themselves with growing in humility, self-control, a servant's attitude, and a resolve to persevere in their covenant promise.

I would suggest that doing those things is far more important than anything else that might happen to get ready for the day of the wedding.

Couples that prepare well set themselves up to start well and enjoy God's gift of marriage for a lifetime.

Couples that fail to prepare well set themselves up for hardship and sadly often end up in very heartbreaking circumstances.

[Did you know that the Bible compares the return of Jesus to a wedding? Jesus is the groom and the church is His bride. Just as it is really important to prepare for a wedding, it is really important to be preparing for Jesus' coming? Our text this morning **1Thessalonians 5:1-11** points us in that direction. In these verses the apostle Paul continues his discussion with believers about Christ's return. The focus of this passage is about believers being ready for that day. I want to point us to four important lessons from this passage. The first one is this...]

Point #1 – Believers anticipate and therefore prepare for Jesus' coming. (Verses 1-4)

Those who know and believe in the hope of the church are living in that expectation and so seek to make themselves ready for Christ's appearing.

The portion of God's word that we are looking at this morning continues Paul's teaching on the return of Christ.

Here he turns to the question of the timing of Jesus' return in **verse 1**.

Leon Morris suggests 'times' has to do with the actual date of the event and 'seasons' refers to the nature of the times leading up to the event.

These believers already have that information, nothing else needs to be said about it.

Jesus is extremely clear on the actual date. He says, "Concerning that day and hour no one knows." (Matt 24:36)

It amazes me that anyone listens to people who predict a date and yet it happens all the time.

Whenever you hear someone predict a date just go ahead and write on your calendar on that date, "Jesus is NOT coming back".

The bible does, however, tell us what the times will be like.

There will be turmoil in creation and there will be a great deal of godlessness being lived out in the world.

I think we see that throughout church history with up and downs through the centuries and I would suggest we can expect an increase at the time of Jesus' coming.

We don't know the exact day, but we do know we are in the last stage of history.

He explains further in verses 2-4.

For the unbeliever Jesus' coming will be like a thief in the night.

Unbelievers will be thinking "There is peace and security".

That doesn't mean the world will necessarily be trouble free, but it does mean people will be living under the illusion that humanity is just fine without knowing the LORD.

It means that people will be living without the expectation of being held to account by Christ.

It is not hard to imagine people thinking everything is good and then wham Jesus comes back.

[Early this year my father in law and I were in a sailboat race sailing with the wind at our back. Things were going along fairly well and then a big gust of wind came up us flipped the sail from one side of the boat to the other slicing the top three or four feet of the sail off and tipping the boat way over. Thankfully we were able to right the boat get the sails down and head in to safety. The big problem there was being surprised. If we had been sailing into the wind and if we had been expecting the gust we wouldn't have had nearly the trouble. The wind would have been the same but we would have been ready for it.]

That is the point here.

Jesus coming is going to happen for believers and unbelievers.

Unbelievers will go from thinking everything is good without the LORD to meeting Him as He brings judgement against all the sin and rebellion in the world and they will be totally unprepared for it.

Believers are different he says, '[we] are not in darkness for that day to surprise [us] like a thief'.

When the sky is set ablaze with the glory of Jesus, believers may be surprised in the moment, we may be filled with awe, but we won't be caught off guard as though something completely unexpected is happening.

Instead we will be saying, "This is what we have been waiting for."

[Here is a big question, "Are we waiting? Are we anticipating Jesus coming?" A really good way to assess whether or not that is true is by asking ourselves, "Are we getting ourselves ready for His coming?" Are we living like we really believe this is going to happen? What does that even look like? What drives us to live like we are getting ready for this to happen? That is what we are shown in the next couple of verses. We are shown that...]

Point #2 – Believers prepare for Jesus' coming out of a desire to live in His kingdom.

When we believe the gospel we become citizens of heaven and strangers to the world, which should mean living in the now like we want God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Verses 5-6)

Having told us that believers 'are not in darkness' so that the day of the Lord would be something unexpected, he continues to tell us what Christians are. (Verse 5)

There are likely two aspects to consider when it comes to the comparison made here between 'darkness' and 'light'

We must consider both knowledge and morality.

Being in the dark in terms of knowledge means not knowing something.

Those who give no consideration to the things of God and to what the Scriptures teach know nothing about what the Bible says about Jesus' coming and in that way they are in the dark.

Darkness also has a moral component.

It has a close association with evil. Those who live in darkness or delight in darkness are those who are living in rebellion against what God commands.

Those that delight in darkness will be caught off guard when Christ comes.

It will be for them a most terrifying moment, one of bitterness and despair.

It is important to remember that such darkness is the natural state of the human heart.

Human beings if left to ourselves live for and delight in things that God hates.

When a person comes to know Jesus as their Saviour that changes.

Ephesians 5:8 says, “⁸...*at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light*”

Where darkness represents evil things, light represents the things that are good in the sight of God.

The pursuit of what is right and pleasing to the LORD is something that requires diligence and attention.

That is the point of **verse 6**.

When we are asleep what are we paying attention to? Nothing.

How much attention does the unbeliever give to the things of God? Very little.

The Christian must be different. The Christian must give his/her attention to what is right and good in the sight of the LORD.

We must be awake and sober to our manner of life.

That is what it means to be a ‘child of light’ it means that we want to live in the kingdom of light.

[Do you remember how Jesus taught His people to pray? He said, “*Pray like this, Our Father in heaven hallowed be you name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...*” I fear it is very easy to pray those words without much of a real desire for those things in our hearts.]

If I were to ask you, “What are you most looking forward to about Jesus’ coming?” What would you say?

Would the thought of the complete conquering of evil in your heart be top of mind?

Would it be that our words will be holy?

Would it be that we will be filled with humility?

Would it be that envy, jealousy, and selfishness would finally be defeated in our hearts?

[That is what the apostle is driving at here. Preparing for Jesus’ coming means living like we want to live in the Kingdom of Heaven. If there is no struggle against evil, if there is no desire for what is right, then how can we say we want Jesus to come? I don’t see how we can and if we don’t care about His coming we won’t be ready for it. Children of light want to live in the light. I hope that is true for you today! If it is there is good news for you in the next part of this passage. The good news is that...]

Point #3 – God has given believers what is needed to be prepared for Jesus’ coming.

The LORD gives His people all that we need to know and all that we need to have in order to be ready for the day of Christ’s arrival. (**Verses 7-8**)

Verse 7 continues the illustration of sleep and drunkenness.

We must keep at the front of our minds here the connection between ‘darkness’/‘night’ and godlessness.

That being the case, ‘sleep’ here is something far more serious than laying our heads on a pillow at night for the rest that our physical bodies need every day.

Sleep here likely refers to people being spiritually dead in their rebellion against the LORD.

The fact is that most people think they are just fine. Most people feel little to no concern over idolatry, malice, greed, coveting, bitterness, unforgiveness, selfishness, rudeness, adultery, lying, and alike.

The one who sleeps is the one is blind to their problem of sin.

The one who ‘gets drunk’ is the one indulges and delights in such things.

That changes when we accept Jesus as LORD and Saviour. Verse 8

Christians belong to the day, meaning we are awake to the things of God.

If that is true the only reasonable course of action in life is to be ‘sober’ in our living.

That is we exercise self-control over our ungodly desires rather than indulge them.

How is that done? He tells us here. It says we are to be sober ‘having put on’ some armour.

[How many kids here this morning have ever seen armor? I have two questions for you. Who puts on armour? Why do they put it on? Soldiers put on armour and they put it on when they are going into battle to protect themselves.]

That is the idea here.

Living for Jesus in the world is very much like a battle. We are at war with the devil and we are at war with everything that would draw us away from Jesus and towards evil.

Because that it true we need some armour.

We are told here about a ‘breastplate’ that is a piece of armor that goes over the chest and stomach.

There is all kinds of important stuff in this area that keeps us alive.

Just like a ‘breastplate’ helps protect the life of a soldier ‘faith’ and ‘love’ protects our spiritual life in Jesus.

Faith is simply believing Who God is, the goodness of His ways, and the truth of His promises.

Love means seeing God as the best and wanting everyone else in the world to enjoy that same feeling.

These are two of the most basic things the Holy Spirit does for us when He makes us alive in Christ.

A 'helmet' is also mentioned here. What is a helmet for? It is to protect our head right?

Protecting our minds as Christians is one of the most important things we can do.

Our minds are protected, it says here, with the 'hope of salvation'.

Do you know what our hope is as Christians? It is Jesus coming back to earth to conquer sin and make all things new.

If God, by His grace, plants the hope of the gospel in us then our minds will be well guarded against the temptations of darkness.

[If we have faith, love, and hope then we have all we need to be ready for Jesus' coming. We have all we need to live as children of the light, we have all we need to be concerned about the things of God, and we have all we need to be self-controlled as we wait for the glorious day when our faith shall become sight. Now, even though we have all that we need it is still a difficult task to be preparing ourselves for eternity. We stumble and fall, we are forgetful, and we are weak. Paul knows that which is why he writes what he does next in this text. He reminds us again of why we can have the hope and he reminds us that we need to constantly point one another to that hope. He shows us that...]

Point #4 – When believers are built up in Christ they are being prepared for His coming.

Hearing the gospel from one another is one of our greatest needs as Christians because as we are grounded in the cross and empty tomb of Christ we will be all the more eager for His appearing. **(Verses 9-11)**

Why be sober minded? Why do we have the armour of faith, love, and hope?

Why is it worth striving to live as 'children of the light' preparing ourselves for Jesus' coming?

We are told in **verse 9-10a** (stop at 'died for us').

Wow! 'God has not destined us for wrath'.

God's wrath is the just punishment He pours out upon those who have rebelled against Him in thought, feeling, or action.

Since every violation of His law is an offense against His infinite glory it requires an eternal punishment.

That brothers and sisters is what we deserve.

If that is what we deserve, why are believers 'not destined for wrath'?

Because we have instead be 'destined...to obtain salvation', that is rescue from God's wrath, 'through our LORD Jesus Christ who died for us.'

We are 'not destined for wrath' because Jesus took God's wrath for us!

If it were not for that there would be no point in striving to live as ‘Children of the light’ because there could be no such thing.

But because we are trusting in Jesus’ dying for us, we are forgiven and made new.

Loving the things of heaven makes sense because Jesus has made the way possible for us to be there which is why Paul can say this in **Verse 10** (start at ‘so that’).

By ‘awake’ or ‘asleep’ he probably means alive or dead.

Whatever our physical condition happens to be from now until to the time of His appearing death will not have the victory over us, we will ‘live with him’.

That is amazing truth and look at what we are supposed to do with it! (Verse 11).

We are to ‘encourage...and build one another up’.

Listen carefully to this, things are never hopeless in the light of what Jesus has done for us!

That is a foundation we can always build on.

[I’ve had the opportunity to participate in building lots of things over the years. I have observed in that time that if there is a good foundation everything else can be straightened out. On the other hand if the foundation is bad no matter how good you may think the rest of the building is it is just a matter of time before it collapses.]

If we try and encourage and build one another up on any other foundation besides the person and work of Christ, it will be utterly useless because you can’t build anything of lasting worth on a rotten foundation.

Pointing each other to the cross and the hope of the empty tomb, reminding each other of all that we have been forgiven, and encouraging each other in the power of the Holy Spirit to trust in God and His promises these are things upon which we can build one another up in Christ so that on the day of His appearing we will not be caught by surprise but will be prepared and happy to enter into His visible presence forever.

Are you ready? If we really believe that Jesus is coming we will want to be prepared?

We’ll want to be prepared because we want to live in His kingdom.

Praise the LORD He has given us all we need in Christ to be prepared.

So then, let us encourage one another and build each other up in the hope of our Saviour Who died for us so that when He comes our hearts would be ready to receive Him.