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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
November 8, 2020  
23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Last Judgment Sunday

Scripture Lessons: Daniel 7:9-10, Matthew 25:31-46  
Hymns: 11; 611:1, 3, 5, 7; 608; 53:1, 2, 6

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. <sup>2</sup>For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup>For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. <sup>4</sup>But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. <sup>5</sup>You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. <sup>6</sup>Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do*, but let us watch and be sober. <sup>7</sup>For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. <sup>8</sup>But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and *as* a helmet the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup>For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup>who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. <sup>11</sup>Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: It's all about timing.

That is true for so many things in life. Sports teams need to be playing their best, “peaking” as the playoffs approach. Investing in the stock market is all about timing. Yes, it's about timing so that one sells when the stock prices are high, and buys when the stock prices are low. Many don't have the courage to buy when they should buy, and they sell in a panic! It's all about timing, and watching, being aware of what's really going on, and being prepared for what's coming. It's all about timing when storms are approaching and officials issue emergency evacuation orders. Those who are prepared are ready to move, others delay, and often find it's too late to evacuate when they think it's time.

We just sang a hymn that emphasized the importance of realizing the timing of the greatest and most critical event for all people. We just sang *“The day is surely drawing near, When God's Son, the Anointed, shall with great majesty appear As Judge of all appointed.”* (The Lutheran hymnal 611:1)

In our text the Apostle Paul addresses this important matter of understanding the truth about what we know of the Lord's timing, and then being --

**THEME: Prepared for Christ's Sudden Coming.**

### **I. The Day of the Lord Comes as a Thief in the Night.**

Paul begins by telling the Thessalonian Christians that they already know a great deal about the Lord's timing for Christ's return.

**1 Thessalonians 5:1-2** “But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. <sup>2</sup>For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.”

The Thessalonian Christians had some confusion sown among them concerning Jesus' return in glory. This is not unusual. Other early Christian congregations struggled with the same questions, as

many Christians do yet today. There are things that we do know. It may sound a little contrary to say that one of things we know about Jesus' return is that we **don't** know the exact time. Jesus taught the disciples, and so also us, that "*of that day and hour (the time of Jesus' coming) no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.*" (Matthew 24:36) God wisely chose not to reveal exactly when Jesus would return in glory, lest we should neglect our faith and not be prepared. That is exactly the problem with human nature. We are already much too inclined to give Christ's return little thought as our minds are occupied with the events of life in this world and the busy-ness of daily life. If we knew with certainty that it was many years, or decades, or even centuries before Jesus' return, we would prioritize our lives accordingly, and not keeping spiritual things first, according to the will of God. This is important for our own spiritual wellbeing, and also when it comes to sharing of our faith with others. We are already inclined to think that there will always be time for that later. But Jesus Himself taught us that knowledge of the timing of Jesus' return is reserved for the Father in heaven. We don't know that there will be a "later." Life around us in this world will go on as normal until the Day arrives.

Paul adds to this thought that the Day of the Lord's return will come as a thief in the night. This speaks to the uncertainty of the timing. The thief does not come when he is expected, but rather he chooses a time when he will be least expected. So it will be with the Lord's coming.

**1 Thessalonians 5:3-4** "For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. <sup>4</sup> But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.

Adding the illustration of childbirth to this lesson helps the Christian understand the need for preparation. We use the expression that a woman is an "expectant mother" or that a married couple is excited because they are "expecting" their child. They know with certainty that the child is coming, and so they prepare. Special doctor appointments will be made and kept. Classes may be taken. A bag will be packed. They may even plot out the route to the hospital. However the actual event of a natural

childbirth comes suddenly, as the labor pains begin. Then the time of the child's arrival has come.

The lesson for us is pretty clear isn't it? We must know that the Lord's Day is coming! We just don't know exactly when. However that is no excuse for being unprepared, we DO KNOW that the Lord's Day is coming, and that it will come **suddenly**. There will not be time for necessary preparations then. Then it will be too late to prepare. Then we will need to be ready to welcome the Lord.

There is no excuse for us to be "in the dark" about this. Paul uses that expression much in the same way we do. Being "in the dark" speaks to living in ignorance. The whole point Paul would have us grasp is that --

## **II. All Should Watch for that Day of the Lord.**

**1 Thessalonians 5:5-8** "You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. <sup>6</sup>Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do*, but let us watch and be sober. <sup>7</sup>For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. <sup>8</sup>But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and *as* a helmet the hope of salvation."

Paul draws a clear contrast, as sharp a contrast as night and day! It is more than just ignorance that proceeds from the darkness of man's heart, the darkness of unbelief. We are reminded that those who sleep, sleep at night. Paul referencing spiritual sleeping, dozing off when one should be alert and watching for what's coming. More than that, Paul adds that so much of the evil of this world is associated with the darkness of night. We know that from our own experience with the civil unrest that has plagued our nation in recent months. Authorities were most concerned about what would be happening in the darkness of night. The darkness of unbelief is a darkness that does not acknowledge God or the authority of God and certainly doesn't comprehend the gospel of salvation. This darkness sees no other reason to live than to make life better for oneself, fulfilling one's own whims and sinful desires. If that means being nice to someone, that's fine. Perhaps they will be nice to me. If that means being mean to someone, well so be it, I got what I wanted. That "looking out for number one,"

and “fulfilling one’s personal desires” proceeds from the darkness of sin, not the light of the gospel!

Too many Christians can get spiritually sleepy in their lives and start to doze off. We may find ourselves being drawn into living in a cavalier fashion, you know, a “eh – whatever!” lifestyle. “If I make it to church, “Eh! Good!” If not, “Well - whatever. I know enough about Jesus. Besides, I’m busy! Life goes on. I’ve got things to do! People to see!” And that, my friends in Christ, is what life is like in this world, and we get drawn right into it. Any of us can, and to a degree, we **all** do. We do start to doze off spiritually because life continues on. Then one day the Lord will suddenly appear! Will we be ready? Will our children be ready?

We are the children of light. Let us watch and be sober, meaning sober-minded, taking life seriously, especially our spiritual lives seriously. Paul encourages putting on “the breastplate of faith” and “the helmet of the hope of salvation.” Paul is talking about armor, **spiritual** armor. I’m not sure we realize we need spiritual armor. We really do! The devil assaults us every day with all manner of temptations, and when he succeeds in tripping us up so that we sin, which we do every day, he switches weapons for the kill with all manner of accusations. He would lead us to doubt the forgiveness of God in Christ, and our own salvation.

The breastplate of faith protects us from these death blows with the assurance of the righteousness of Christ. God sent Jesus to take away our sin, with all its guilt and condemnation. As often as the devil would accuse us of sin, we need just as often to hear that blessed gospel assurance that *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”* (Romans 8:1)

The helmet of the hope of salvation again protects us when we are well founded in the truth of God’s Word. We know the truth by the Holy Spirit’s renewing of our minds, and only with that God given knowledge can we dismiss the lies of this world about God and creation and the billions of years of world history. These lies may lead people to believe there are billions of years to come with no accountability to God, or anyone else for that matter.

We know differently. We don't *think* we know the truth. WE KNOW the truth! Jesus said, "*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. <sup>32</sup> And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*" (John 8:31) We **know** that our Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, came down to earth to be our Brother. We **know** Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law by His sufferings and death on the cross. We **know** that Jesus "*abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*" (2 Timothy 1:10) We **know** that "*God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*" (Philippians 2:9-11). Every knee shall bow before Him. Every tongue shall confess Jesus is Lord. **All** shall stand before our Lord Jesus, on the Last Day. Our gospel lesson was very clear about the accountability on the Lord's Day. We are blessed to know this truth, and this truth is our helmet of the hope of salvation. It protects us from the lies and deceptions of the devil and this evil world.

The point of wearing the breastplate of faith and this helmet of the hope of salvation is in the end to obtain the victory! We are looking forward to the day of the Lord!

### **III. The Day of the Lord Is Our Day of Salvation.**

Paul wrote in our text:

**1 Thessalonians 5:9-10** "For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him."

The day of the Lord's return will not be DOOMS DAY! Not for us! How do you know that? Well, God has **not** appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation. It is spelled out for us as a progression of salvation in Romans 8: "*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among **many** brethren. <sup>30</sup> Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; (as the Lord has called you to faith) whom He called, these He also justified;*(as the Lord has

proclaimed you to be righteous and holy before Him) *and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*" (As the Lord will receive you to the glory of heaven forevermore!) (Romans 8:29-30) And that "glorified" part is what the Day of Lord is for us.

That is what it shall be whether we are resting in our graves, or walking on the face of the earth. When the Lord suddenly appears "*We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*" (1 John 3:2) We will hear Jesus' blessed words of invitation, "*Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" (Matthew 25:34)

While we are in this world we will face many difficulties, and we will be subject to temptations, to tribulations and even persecutions. We see all the evil in this world. The social and political discourse in our nation along with society's endorsements of grievous sins like abortion and homosexuality, these sins burden the hearts of the children of God. There are many things in life that weigh upon us. But we have this truth of salvation that Christ has "*overcome the world,*" (John 16:33) and He has gotten us the victory! Nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:39)

That's the comfort we have in knowing of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul concludes this teaching by saying: "Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing." (v. 11) We comfort one another with the gospel, reminding one another of the wonder of God's love in Jesus. In just a few weeks we will be celebrating Jesus' birth again. That celebration is all about the edifying and building up of one's another's faith in joy and love. Let us share the joy that fills our hearts so that with eager anticipation we look forward to the Day of the Lord's coming.

**AMEN.**

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Amen. (Romans 15:13 NKJV)