

Christian, There is a Big Day Coming!

- I. Be Ready
- II. Be Different
- III. Be Confident

*5 Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.*

*4 But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

Tell me, do you have any big events coming up in your life? You know, a date you have circled on the calendar. A special occasion that you're looking forward to celebrating. Maybe you are looking ahead to Thanksgiving and a chance to have an extended vacation. Or maybe there's a family member who's getting married and you're looking forward to celebrating that event with them. Maybe you can see your retirement in the not-too-distant future and you're making plans for how you're going to enjoy it. Or maybe your daughter recently announced that she's expecting a baby and now you're counting the days until you welcome into this world your first grandchild.

If you think about it, there are a lot of things that we look forward to in life. Events that we, in a very real sense, eagerly anticipate. In fact, sometimes it's our anticipation of those future events that positively impacts our attitude and even our behavior in the days leading up to that event. Isn't that right? You maybe don't care about your diet until you realize, "Wait a minute, I want to fit into that mother of the bride dress." Or you think "That extra bedroom is soon going to be the nursery so I better get out the paint brushes." Sometimes big events in our future affect how we think and how we act in the present.

Well, you realize, that of all the big events in your future, there is not a single one bigger than the one that we're going to focus on today. It's the one that Saint Paul describes here in our text as "The Day of the Lord." Bigger than any birthday or wedding or retirement celebration, is the day when Jesus Christ will visibly return to this Earth with all his angels, in all his glory, to do what? To judge the living and the dead. My friends, if you think about it, that's the definition of a really big event. Which brings us to our sermon theme today, Christian,

There's a Big Day Coming

As we look forward to that final day of judgment, the Apostle Paul here in our text offers us three words of encouragement.

- I. Be Ready
- II. Be Different
- III. Be Confident

The words that we have before us are recorded in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. In this letter Paul has already addressed one of the misconceptions that the Thessalonians had about Judgment Day. They thought that the people who had already died were somehow going to miss out on the Lord's return. But St Paul clarifies their thinking by explaining the chain of events on the Last Day with these words. *According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)* (As it turns out, those are the very words that we studied in our Zoom Bible class this week. Lots of application for our lives.)

But notice, after Paul writes these words about Jesus specifically coming again in glory, what does Paul say will be the timing of that event? Well, that's where our text for today picks up. Paul writes, *Now, brothers and sisters, about the times in the dates we do not need to write to you, (in other words, we can't give you a specific day or time for the Lord's Advent. Why not? Because, as Paul goes on to say) for you know that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.*

Jesus often used the picture of a thief in the night to describe how unexpected his return would be. I mean, if you knew exactly when the burglar was going to show up at your door, you could be waiting for him with a baseball bat. (Or maybe I should say so you could have the police waiting for him.) But the fact is, you don't know exactly when the thief is coming, so you've got to be ready all the time. You've got to keep the doors locked throughout the night. You need to always be vigilant. Well, Paul says the same thing is true regarding Jesus' return. Because no one, except God alone, knows the day or hour of Jesus' return, we need to be ready at all times.

The sad thing is, there are a whole lot of people in Paul's day, and a whole lot of people today, who are anything but ready for the Lord's return. For a lot of people, the very idea that there is going to be a day of final reckoning, the end of the world as we know it, standing before God as he judges billions of people in our world—for a lot of people, well, that's ludicrous. In their minds, there's no way there's going to be a Judgment Day. Actually, St. Peter predicted that there would be such people when he wrote, *In the last days, scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning."* (2 Peter 3:4).

Of course, there are others who may not necessarily deny that there will be a day of final judgment, but who are pretty sure that they don't have to worry about it. I mean, in their minds, it's not like the God is going to send them to hell. They figure they've done enough good things in life to earn a place in heaven. So they say, "I think I'm all right with God. I'm at peace. I'll be safe from the coming fire." Actually, Paul is talking about those people here in our text when he writes, *While people are saying, "Peace and safety" (in other words, "We'll be fine"), destruction will come on them suddenly as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.*

Do you see why Paul uses the illustration of a pregnant woman? Even though there may be some warning signs that a woman is about to go into labor (just as Jesus says that there are

some warning signs before his second coming), the fact is, when a woman goes into labor, there is no turning back. She can't say, "On second thought, let's not do this. I'd prefer to just avoid all this pain." Too late! By the time a woman goes into labor, there's going to be a delivery—whether she's ready for it or not! So it is with the day of judgment. When Jesus suddenly returns to this world, there's no going back. You're either ready or you're not. And unfortunately, there are a lot of people who are not ready. By their denial of Jesus' second coming, they're going to be caught totally unprepared. They going to be left standing in the darkness.

But notice what Paul says about you and me, along with the Thessalonian Christians. *You, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day you should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day.* In fact, he then goes on to include himself. *We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.*

So what does Paul mean by those terms, children of the light and children of the day? Well, think back to what Jesus said in John, chapter 12. *"I have come into the world as a light so that no one who believes in me should stay in the darkness."* And again, *"Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of the light."* (John 12:46 and 36). So who are the children of the light? You are, dear Christians. By the power of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit called you and me out of the darkness of sin and unbelief into the light of Christ. He's opened our eyes to see that without Jesus, we'd all be damned. But with Jesus' blood and righteousness covering our sins and guilt, we've been made holy in God's eyes. God has redeemed us and made us his people.

If you think about it, isn't that what makes us ready for the Lord's return? We know that when we stand before the judgement seat of God, he will judge us not on the basis of what we've done, but on the basis of what Jesus has done for us. As long as we're dressed in Jesus' righteousness, we can be sure that no matter when the big day comes, we will I. Be Ready.

And yet, here in our text, St. Paul makes it clear that this time between now and the Last Day, is not only a time to be ready, it's also time to: II. Be Different. Here Paul writes about the impact that knowing where we're going when we die, knowing who we're going to meet there, knowing what God has in store for us—how all those things impact our attitudes and behavior, especially in contrast to those who don't know what's going to happen to them or don't believe in Judgment Day, in other words, those who are still living in the darkness.

How does Paul put it? *We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like the others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober.* Do you see the connection that Paul makes between those who are in the darkness (that is, those who don't believe that Jesus will return again as judge), and those who are asleep (in other words, those who are oblivious what is about to happen to them)? Or to put it another way, when people are in the dark, they fall asleep—or they get drunk. What does Paul say? *For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.* Now, while it's true that a lot of partying takes place after dark, that's really not Paul's point here. His point is that when people are living in spiritual darkness, it shows in their behavior. It shows in their lack of self-control.

But Paul says that the opposite is also true. Because God has brought us into the light, because he's made us to be the children of the day, he has made us to be different from the rest of the world. and that difference shows in our lives. Paul writes, *Since we belong to the day, let us be sober,* (not only free from the control of alcohol or drugs, but free from the control of Satan himself). And how do we do that? Paul says, *by putting on faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet.*

Paul uses that same picture in Ephesians chapter 6 when he speaks about the armor of

God with which we can extinguish the flaming arrows of the Evil One. Or you think about how Paul uses a very similar analogy in Romans 13 when he writes, *So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh. (Romans 13:12-14)*

Through all these verses, Paul's point is the same: Because God has brought us into the light, because he's opened our eyes to see and believe in Jesus as our savior, he's also given us the desire and the ability to set aside the deeds of darkness, and in so doing, be different from the world around us. As we look forward to the coming of the Big Day, God has equipped us to: I. Be Ready, but also to II. Be Different.

And yet, if we're honest with ourselves, we'll admit that too often we haven't been all that different from the world. There are a lot of times when we've blended right in with everyone else. Our hearts contain just as much bitterness and jealousy, lust and worry as our unbelieving neighbors. And even when we aren't as openly sinful as the next person, we fall victim to the sins of pride and self-righteousness—all of which may lead us to say, "Man, what hope do I have of surviving Judgment Day?" But you see, that's why Paul concludes this section by saying, in effect, when it comes to the Day of Final Judgment, "Christian, III. Be Confident.

Understand, that doesn't mean be confident in what you have done for God, but rather, be confident in what God has done for you. Confident in what God promises that he still will do for you in Christ. What does Paul say here in our text? *God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.* In other words, God did not bring us into this world just so he could damn us. No, he put us here so that he could save us, through the merits of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, it's Jesus' perfect life, his innocent death and his glorious resurrection, that give us confidence about our future in the presence of God forever. How did Paul put it? [Jesus] died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. In other words, whether Jesus comes in the middle of the day or the middle of the night, whether he comes while I'm still alive or after I die, I can know that by God's grace, through faith in Jesus, I will live forever with him. And by God's grace, through faith in Jesus, so can you.

We may not be able to mark the date on our calendar. But as Christians, we know that there is a really big day coming in our future. May our anticipation of Jesus' glorious return keep us trusting in him and living for him, until that big, glorious day when we see him face to face. In his name, Amen.