

Happy Mother's Day! I was driving around Richardson a couple of weeks ago and, when I came to a red light, I saw this guy holding a sign. "Repent, Repent. People get ready. Jesus is coming!" What do we think when we see someone holding up that type of sign? What do we do when we see a sign like that? Is there any merit to what he's trying to say? We may be inclined to dismiss him or question his theology. But one thing we can't escape is that what he says on his sign is true. Jesus is coming back, and we should be prepared.

What we can't see in that picture, though, is the motivation of this man's heart. We don't know why he's out there holding up the sign. Is it a warning? A threat? An encouragement? Is he writing to those who don't know Jesus? Those who know Jesus? It brings up the interesting question of how should we communicate that truth to one another. What is the purpose of reminding each other that Jesus is coming back?

We are towards the end of our series in the book of 1 Thessalonians called *Last Things First*. It's a letter from the Apostle Paul to a young church in the city of Thessalonica, and a common theme in his letter is the return of Jesus and how they are supposed to live in light of that. As we move into chapter 5, we will once again see Paul talking about Jesus' return, and this time he does so by referring to an event called "the day of the Lord". That sounds heavy, maybe even ominous. The Thessalonians certainly had some questions and concerns about that day, and after giving his explanation and exhortation, which we'll look at, he closes the section with this command.

[1 THESSALONIANS 5:11] ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

In other words, the day of the Lord is good news. God calls all of us to be sign-holders for each other. The church is to be a place of mutual encouragement and edification, where we preach the good news of the Gospel to one another regularly and remind each other of the truth of Christ's certain return. This morning, we're going to look at the reality and ramifications of the day of the Lord and consider three ways it should impact our thinking and our actions.

Revelation to be fully aware. The return of the Jesus is something to be understood and eagerly anticipated by his followers.

[1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-4] Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.

Paul makes reference to the day of the Lord and, biblically speaking, it's a loaded concept. The day of the Lord is a phrase and event that has roots in the writings of Old Testament prophets. It was also taught about by Jesus, and is referenced throughout the New Testament. The day of the Lord represents a time when God breaks into human history to carry out His sovereign plan. In the Old Testament, prophets spoke of the day of the Lord as a warning to the nation of Israel or to

declare God's judgment on his enemies and deliverance for his people. In the New Testament, the day of the Lord refers to Christ's return, the final judgment of our fallen world, and Christ's final victory. It is God's final intervention in human affairs to punish sin, restore his faithful followers, and establish his rule over the nations.

That means the day of the Lord will be experienced in very different ways for those who are followers of Jesus and those who are not. While it ushers in the final act of God's redemptive plan, and the deliverance of God's people, it will be a period of great surprise, judgment, and suffering for non-believers. Paul uses two illustrations to explain what will happen. First is a thief who sneaks in at night when everyone is asleep. That is not intended to say the day of the Lord will happen at night, it's simply to say that it will come unexpectedly. He also compares it to labor to communicate that destruction will come with unpredictable suddenness and great personal discomfort.

Moms, the Apostle Paul honors you on this Mother's Day by equating God's judgment of the world to what you went through having babies. I can understand his illustration a little bit. I told a few of our staff I was excited to talk about how this passage lines up with what we celebrate today, and Cheryl Read's immediate comment was, "Don't you dare get on that platform and pretend to know what it's like to have a baby." So, I'm not. But I have observed it, I've been in the room, and I remember it included a monitor that measured Martha's contractions. I seemed to be the only one looking at it and started to suspect that they put that in there solely for the dads, like it's some kind of empathy machine. It was both amazing and awful to watch because, at any given moment and without warning, Martha would wince with discomfort and the numbers on that monitor would climb very rapidly. Thankfully, the sudden pain and discomfort resulted in a joyful moment of the birth of a child. For those who are not followers of Christ, though, there is no joyful ending. Paul says they won't be able to escape the destruction brought upon them by the Lord. In the midst of presumed peace and security, likely referencing the peace treaty signed with Israel, God's judgment will come suddenly and unexpectedly, and it won't be pleasant.

For followers of Jesus, though, there should be no surprise. It's clear from these verses Paul had already instructed the Thessalonians Jesus would return. For us, we have the entire counsel of God that speaks to the certainty of Jesus coming back. You can't be surprised by someone you are expecting. And though we don't know the timing, we do know that he will return.

The challenge is how we live in light of knowing of Christ's return. For some of us, there is a risk of apathy. Jesus is coming back, so what does it matter? This attitude can lead to spiritual lethargy, where our relationship with the Lord gets stale, or it can tempt us to live for ourselves and indulge the way we did before Jesus. For others of us, the risk is fear; that Jesus is going to come back, and if he times it just right and I'm not doing what I'm supposed to be doing, I'm in for it. Paul addresses both of those risks in the rest of the passage that should impact the way we think and act.

Motivation to be fully awake. The certainty of Christ's return should inspire us to live our lives for him as children of God; that we would be anticipating his imminent return and living like it matters.

[1 THESSALONIANS 5:5-8] ⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. ⁶ So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

Paul begins with a statement of identity. We have to know who we are to know what this means. Without that, we'll struggle to see this as encouragement and motivation. Christians have been born to a new reality, participating in a new era of God's redemptive plan. We operate in a different sphere of life than non-Christians. We have been saved from the darkness and now belong to the realm of light. This is more than poetic language or a statement that we have been given some enlightenment. It is an expression of who we now are. Paul said it more explicitly to the Ephesians:

[EPHESIANS 5:8] ⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.

If we are children of light and the day, that means we no longer belong to darkness and night. Paul changes from "you" to "we/us". He's reminding them this is the identity and call of the entire church. Darkness is two-fold: it includes both a lack of knowledge about God and also a life separate from him. Before we became followers of Jesus, we were not just in the dark, we were of the dark. In Paul's day, culture looked at darkness, the night, as the time when people were up to no good. If I was going to misbehave, I was going to do it at night and in the dark. It's why we tell our kids "be home before dark". Paul uses it here spiritually, saying that darkness is the dominion of sin that characterizes the life of those who don't know Jesus.

That's not who we are anymore. That means our life in Christ should be like night and day when compared to our life before Christ. It's not a magic switch where we are entirely disobedient one day, trust in Jesus, and then we're completely obedient the next day. Remember a couple weeks ago we said that we are all a work in progress. But the day of your salvation is the day the sun started to rise in your life. And just as the sun gets higher and brighter as the day goes on, the more we should live in the light as our walk with Jesus progresses and we anticipate his return. If we are sons and daughters of the light and of the day, we should live like it. Paul says we do that by keeping awake and being sober.

Awake means to have a moral readiness, to be alert, and to be sensitive to what God is doing, what the forces of this world are doing. Being awake means we are prepared for and expecting Jesus to return. Paul contrasts that with being asleep. Moms, many of you have struggled with trying to wake up a sleeping kid, particularly teenagers. They aren't ready for anything. Paul warns against it because that's what characterizes the moral and spiritual indifference of those who do not know Jesus. He knows a believer can have a sleepy faith that leads to spiritual lethargy and insensitivity. That person is not ready for Christ's return. So Paul says to be awake.

I saw a wonderful and somewhat hilarious example of this yesterday. I was coaching my nine-year-old's baseball game which, if I'm being honest, is not all that enthralling. That is, except for our catcher because, if there was a runner on third, he would catch each pitch, quickly raise it to

his right ear, and begin marching towards third base. Didn't matter if the runner wasn't even moving. This guy was on it. Understand, this was more than just paying attention. He owned his identity as catcher, he was ready to carry out the duty of that identity, and he played the game on high alert, ready and prepared for the "coming" of that runner on third base. The follower of Jesus is a child of the day and should keep awake, ready and prepared for his second coming.

We are also to be sober. The idea here is that we would live a life of self-control. When someone is drunk, they lose their senses and really aren't in control of their faculties anymore. They are highly influenced by forces outside of themselves and are unable to respond as they should. We can be intoxicated by many things that diminish our sensitivity to God's influence: intoxicants, sex, stuff, busyness. This can lead to a spiritual lethargy and outright disobedience.

Thankfully God equips us so that we are prepared as we await his return. Verse 8 says, because of who we are in Christ as children of the day, we have been given defensive resources to live this out. Paul gives a mini-version of the armor of God, using one of his favorite analogies of a soldier. Paul again references the triad of faith, hope, and love. We can remain steadfast through our faith in God, which results in the outpouring of love for others, while holding fast to our hope of salvation, that settled assurance we have that Jesus is coming back and we will be saved.

Understand, there is a difference between being ready to go to heaven and being ready to meet the Lord. Think about meeting someone important for the first time. You'd get ready for that. You'd want to look your best and act your best. It might be someone you've always looked up to. It might be someone whose opinion you value. It might be going to a job interview. It might be the family of young lady you want to marry. I remember the first time I met all of Martha's family, I was intent on closing the deal right away. I'm 4.5 years younger than her and what I brought to the relationship was a giant pile of student loan debt. So I wore a tie...and it worked! We prepare for these encounters because we value the people involved. One day all of us will be face-to-face with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. How will he find us?

Is it time for a wake-up call? No shame intended in that question. But I want you to answer it sincerely. Listen, I'll go first. There have been times in my life where I have been sound asleep spiritually. I wasn't captivated by God's love, I wasn't interested in his Word, and I wasn't motivated by his commands. And I certainly wasn't compelled by his return. The Thessalonians were under heavy persecution. The certainty of Christ's return helped them to persevere. For many of us, though, life here is pretty good, and the second coming is not on top of mind. If you have a sleepy faith, you likely have a tired relationship w/ God (at least in your eyes). Would you start by simply confessing that to him?

Don't be surprised when God tries to wake you up. Sometimes God will move assertively to grab our attention and shake us out of our slumber. Or he may use others to wake us up. Remember, we're sign-holders for each other, and sometimes that sign needs to include an alarm clock to help wake up our brothers and sisters who are asleep in their faith. The best way for us to do that is by living fully awake ourselves. Let's also remind each other of the following truth.

Confirmation we are fully alive. A believer in Christ should long for the day of the Lord. Paul continues with encouraging words to forgiven people.

[1 THESSALONIANS 5:9-10] ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.

Paul has just addressed how we should act in light of Christ's return, and now he moves to how we should think in light of it. This passage is a significant argument for a pretribulation rapture. Remember last week Gary had the signs and the Rapture was first, then the Tribulation. If the Tribulation is where God pours out his wrath on the world, and we are not due his wrath, that means we'll be gone.

Some of you have it in your mind that God is mad at you and when he comes back, you're going to get it. If you are a follower of Christ, your sins have been judged and paid for on the Cross. You are no longer due God's wrath because the wrath God had for your sins was poured out on his Son on your behalf. You are forgiven. And that means you have nothing to be afraid of! The second to last verse in the Bible includes the words of Jesus saying, "Surely, I am coming" and is immediately followed by the response of the Apostle John who says, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." Why? Because the follower of Jesus should be eager for his return, because when he comes back, he's coming back for us, so that we can live with him forever.

If you are here and not a follower of Jesus, know that he died for you too. He offers you the gift of forgiveness and eternal life. All you have to do is accept it in faith.

And after Paul lays all that out, he tells us to encourage and build up one another with it. You are God's messenger. You are the carrier of the good news of the Gospel, and you are to preach it to your brothers and sisters often. This world will do all it can to distract us, consume us, and keep us from living in light of this truth, intending to leave us unprepared for Christ's return. The call to keep awake and be sober, and to hold fast to our hope in Jesus, must be a family affair. What an incredible privilege each of us has to be a light-bearer to each other and to help keep us prepared for that glorious day when our Lord and Savior returns.