

# WAITING FOR THE LAST JUDGMENT

November 12, 2023  
Rev. Piet Van Kampen

Old Testament Lesson; Daniel 7:9-10  
Psalm of the Day; Psalm 90  
Gospel Lesson; Matthew 26:31-46  
Sermon Text; 1Thessalonians 5:1-11

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

God's Word for our consideration today is our Epistle Lesson, taken from 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, chapter five, verses one through eleven. The Apostle Paul writes:

Concerning the times and dates, brothers, there is no need to write to you, for you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When people are saying, "Peace and security," destruction will suddenly come on them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will certainly not escape. But you, brothers, are not in the dark so that this day takes you by surprise like a thief, for you are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness. So then let us not sleep like everyone else, but rather let us remain alert and sober.

To be sure, those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 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. You see, God did not appoint us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as you are also doing.

So far the Word of our God.

These are your words, Heavenly Father. Make us holy by your truth. Your Word is truth.

Amen

I wasn't ready. I knew about the fire drill. I got the email from Mr. Shoefeld saying: "Fire drill, 10:30 a.m." I even thought to myself, "*I am looking forward to it.*" I was thinking it is such a beautiful day. It will be nice to get outside for a few minutes, and stand outside. But then I got so engrossed in what I was doing, and so involved in the work that I was doing that I did not look at the clock. Then, all of a sudden out of nowhere, the fire alarm goes off. You have not seen a guy jump out of his seat, the way I jumped out of my seat at that moment, (*especially a big guy like me*)! You never see a guy get that high up in the air! I am glad nobody was watching. Thankfully, I recovered my composure, was able to get outside, and stand with the Three K and Four K kids for a few minutes, (*which is probably where I belonged*). The reality was, I was not ready for the fire drill. I wasn't prepared. I did not know all of the things I was supposed to do in order to be ready, even though I knew it was coming.

In some ways, waiting for The Day of Judgment, is kind of like waiting for that fire drill. We know it is coming. We know, as Paul says,

**“...the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”**

We don't know exactly when. We don't know exactly the time, but we know our Lord can return at any time. It is something frankly we are looking forward to. And yet, how easily it is for us to become engrossed in different things, to become so involved in our work, or to become so involved in our family life here on earth, or our relationships, or to be so engrossed in our sports' teams and what they are doing, and 'so on, and so forth'. It is so easy to get distracted by all of these different things, that we could wind up being in that situation where our Lord Jesus comes again, and we are not ready.

So how do we prepare ourselves for Christ's coming? How do we become a people who waits for The Day of Judgment? You think about what a fire drill is supposed to do. A fire drill prepares you for the reality of a possible fire. God's Word prepares you for the reality of Christ's coming. Here in 1 Thessalonians, chapter five, the Apostle Paul gives us three steps for **Waiting for The Day of Judgment**.

-Step One, simply **remember who you are**. Remember who you are. Starting in verse twenty, he says,

**“Concerning the times and dates, brothers, there is no need to write to you, for you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When people are saying, “Peace and security,” destruction will suddenly come on them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will certainly not escape.”**

You know, we need to make no mistake about that last day that is coming. It is going to be a Day of Judgment. The destruction that comes on that last day is going to be swift, and it is going to sudden. Paul uses the picture of labor pains coming on a pregnant woman. All of a sudden, out of nowhere, that pain, and travail is there. There are pictures all over the Bible that describe how sudden Christ's

coming is going to be at the end of time. In the Old Testament, the prophet Amos described The Day of the Lord as,

**“A man enters his house, and puts his hands on the wall,  
only to be bitten by a snake.”**

Just imagine the surprise of that moment.

You have pulled into the garage with your car. You grabbed all of your groceries out of the back. You open the door into the kitchen, walk in, and set all of your stuff down on the counters. You are a little bit out of breath, and decide, *“I am home. I am safe, and I can relax.”* You lean your hand on the wall above the counter, and all of a sudden you feel the most excruciating pain. You look, and there are those two fang marks from a snake, and then you see it slithering away! It was a copperhead that you did not notice, because it kind of matched the pattern of your granite counters. As the numbing works its way up your arm, and your breathing begins to labor, you realize, *“It is too late!”*

If you scoff at final judgment, if you think this life is all there is, if you look at your life as you are living it now, and you say, *“This is it. This is where everything is fantastic. This is where I want to be. This is where I might as well relax, and have a good time. There is nothing really to look forward to after this. This is what I want,”* you are going to be in for a rude awaking one day. For the children of darkness, the Day of the Lord is going to come. All of a sudden, it will be just too late. Too late to repent. Too late to ask for God's mercy and forgiveness. Too late to find the Lord.

But, you know what? The apostle Paul says that is not you. He says that is not you. He says,

**“But you, brothers, are not in the dark  
so that this day takes you by surprise like a thief,  
for you are all sons of the light and sons of the day.**

**We do not belong to the night or the darkness.”**

Remember who you are. You and I are not children of the darkness.

We are not children of unbelief. We are sons of the light, and sons of the day. In verse nine Paul goes on to say,

**“...God did not appoint us for wrath,  
but for obtaining salvation  
through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

-You and I are redeemed children of God, bought with the precious blood of Christ.

-We have been adopted as His children, through the waters of His Baptism.

-We have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, as He has put faith in our hearts.

-We are recipients of grace, God's grace, and mercy, in Christ.

And so, Paul says remember who you are, as we are waiting for the Day of Judgment.

Judgment Day is not something for Christians to be afraid of. In fact, Judgment Day is something we, as believers, look forward to because it is going to be the first day when we finally experience the fullness of our salvation, where we experience what it is like to see Jesus face to face. It is something you and I will not want to miss. That is why we are waiting for the last day.

-Which takes us to step two. We are a people who are waiting for the last judgment, since we are expectantly waiting for that day. The Apostle Paul does not just say, “remember who you are”. He also says, “**live out who you are**”. He goes on to say,

**“So then let us not sleep like everyone else,  
but rather let us remain alert and sober.”**

We do not belong to the night, and the darkness. We are children of the light. We are saved by God's grace in Christ. We are enlightened by the Holy Spirit to see with eyes of faith our Lord and Savior is coming again one day.

And yet, how easily we are distracted by the darkness of the world around us. How easily we are tempted to think sometimes that we

can 'flirt with that darkness' a little bit. We can 'dance with that darkness'. We can live in 'the twilight zone', so to speak, between following the light of our Lord Jesus Christ, and walking in the darkness of sin. God's Word reminds us that the idea of that 'twilight zone' is an illusion. There is light, and there is darkness. Really there is nothing in between. You are either in the light, or you are in the darkness. Paul says,

**“To be sure,  
those who sleep (as in sleep in the darkness of unbelief),  
those who sleep, sleep at night,  
and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.”**

What he means by that is those who live as though the day of judgment is not coming, those who live as though this life is all that there is, they are living in darkness. They are living in that darkness of unbelief. It is a darkness that is not worth 'dancing' with. The darkness is not nearly as fun as it is made out to be in TV, and in the movies. It is a darkness that, for many, will last forever. So, that is why Paul says,

**“But since we belong to the day,  
let us be sober...”**

Now, we live in the state of Wisconsin. That word '*sober*' maybe makes you think a little bit, makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand up, because you wonder, “*What exactly does that mean?*”

“*Does that mean we are not supposed to have any fun, ever again?*”  
“*Does that mean we Christians are supposed to be so serious all of the time about everything?*”

In order to understand '*sober*', you have to understand what Paul means by '*drunk*'. When you think about '*drunkenness*', what is '*drunkenness*'? '*Drunkenness*' is '*to lose yourself, to lose your self control, to dull your senses to the point you are unaware*'. You are unaware of your surroundings. You are unaware of the passage of time. You are unaware of the things you are saying, and doing. You

are unaware, and frankly, unprepared for whatever may be coming around the corner.

Now, you contrast that with the idea of being 'sober'. 'Sober' really is all about just *'being clear headed, having an understanding of reality, being awake, being alert, being ready for what is coming, being prepared'*. Ultimately, 'sober' is to be in a state of looking forward to the day when the 'real fun' begins.

To that end, God does not just let us exist in this world, without any help. God has provided 'equipment' for us in order to be able to do that. He has given us 'the breastplate and a helmet'. When you think about what a breastplate and a helmet do, the breastplate is there to protect your heart. The helmet is there to protect your head. So, Paul says,

**“But since we belong to the day,  
let us be sober,  
putting on faith and love as the breastplate,  
and the hope of salvation as the helmet.”**

When we think about how God's gift of faith and love protect our heart, and how the promise of the hope of salvation protects our head, think about Joseph in The Bible. You know Joseph, right? You know the story of Joseph. Joseph was one of twelve brothers. He was sold into slavery by his brothers. He was taken down to Egypt, and placed into service in the home of Potiphar. Potiphar was the captain of Pharaoh's guard. The Lord blessed Joseph, while he was serving as a slave in Egypt, and made Joseph eventually the manager of Potiphar's entire house. All of the other servants and slaves answered to him. But he was so young and handsome that Potiphar's wife decided she was going to seduce Joseph. She repeatedly, again and again, tried to get him to come to bed with her. (*Talk about 'dancing with the darkness', right?*) And yet, what was Joseph's respond?

**“How could I do such a wicked thing**

## **and sin against God?”**

Joseph's faith and love, his faith in God, and his love for God, protected his heart from that temptation, and that desire to 'dance with the darkness'. The hope of salvation, the promise of the coming Savior for Joseph, protected his mind from the false thinking, *“This life is all there is, so you might as well go out there, and have as much fun as you can right now, because when you are gone, it is going to be over.”*

### **The hope of salvation protects your mind, and faith and love protect your heart.**

They don't do us any good, if we don't 'wear them'. That is why it is so important for us to listen to the promises of The Gospel so that God can continue to grant us His hope, and strengthen our faith in Him, and love for Him. That is why Paul, here, reminds us today of those very promises. He says,

**“You see, God did not appoint us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him.”**

The **“awake”**, or the **“asleep”** that Paul is talking about it is not just when you are asleep at night, and awake during the day. He is talking about *'awake'*, as in *'alive here on earth'*, or *'asleep'*, as in *'the sleep of death'*.

Think about what that promise means for you and me. Christ Jesus, the very Light of the world, the Light that brought all things into creation, the eternal God, took on human flesh, entered this world, and died for us. He shed His blood to rescue us from sin and death, not so that we can, when He comes again, go into perdition, into Hell. He died for us, Paul says, that we might live with Him, that we might live in His Light for all eternity. What Paul is saying here is whether that happens today, while we are still alive, whether Jesus comes again today, while we are still alive, or whether it happens a



thousand years from now, long after we are dead, it doesn't matter. We know that Jesus is going to keep that promise. We know He is going to come again in glory. And so, for now, we live out who we are, as a people who are waiting for that glorious day, awake and alert.

-That leads us to **step three**. As people who are expectantly waiting for The Day of Judgment, **encourage one another**. In verse eleven Paul concludes by saying, "Therefore". In other words, *"Everything I have said up to this point, this is the conclusion."*

**"Therefore, encourage one another,  
and build each other up,  
just as you also are doing."**

Encourage one another, when the faithful we know fall asleep in death. Encourage one another, when we see injustice going on in the world, and it seems to us 'the wheels' of God's justice turns ever so slowly, and that Christ's coming is taking forever, encourage one another. As we see the darkness deepen, and the temptation to 'dance with that darkness' grows ever stronger, encourage one another, and build each other up. Encourage one another, as we together, as a congregation, sound that alarm, not only among ourselves, but to the whole world, that says our Lord Jesus is going to return, and He can return at any time. Encourage one another with those Gospel promises, the promise that when our King comes again, you and I are going to inherit The Kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world. The Kingdom of Heaven! Encourage one another, as we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Every time we gather for worship, every hymn we sing together, every time I hear your voices, and you hear my voice, every time we study the Word of God, every time we confess the second coming of Christ in the words of The Creed, every time we look ahead to Christ's coming, we are doing exactly what Paul has told us to do.

We are already encouraging each other.

So, today, let's close by speaking some of those encouraging words.

In our hymnbook, on page thirty-one, we are going to say the last line of the Nicene Creed together. That last line that starts with those two words, "*We look...*"

**We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come.**

**Amen.**

Amen

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,  
guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen