

Awaiting Jesus Together

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[0 : 00] Tonight's Bible passage is taken from page 1188 in the Church Bible in front of you. It's 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, reading verses 1 to 11.

It's 1 Thessalonians 5. Now brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you. For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

While people are saying peace and safety, destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains in a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.

You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness, so then let us not be like others who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober.

For 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.

[1 : 17] For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive 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 one another up, just as, in fact, you are doing. Amen. Well, thank you, David, for reading.

It would be a great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open at page 1188 as we dive into God's Word together. There is an outline that should be coming up on this screen that shows where we are going to go tonight, and hopefully that will help you follow along.

As we have looked at this letter by Paul, Silas, and Timothy over the evening refresh series, we have seen it is written to be a huge encouragement to a young church that the three people had to leave earlier than they might have wanted to.

It is written to help them keep going while they are in a city that is violently opposing the gospel work that they are doing. It is a letter full of thanksgiving for all that God has done, and it is an exciting reminder of all that God will do in the future.

[2 : 30] Let's pray together as we start. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the work of your Son, our Savior. That means we can sit here tonight as your children. Thank you that your Word is not just true, but powerful to transform.

So as we come humbly under your Word, would you transform our hearts and minds to love you more and make us more like you. In the mighty name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Amen. What do you do when you need to remember something that is really important? Something that if you forget, it would be an absolute disaster. Do you set a reminder on your phone?

Maybe you are the kind of person who sets five reminders on their phone. Maybe you ask a friend, family, member, colleague, or some prefer to rely on Siri and Alexa, thinking they've got a better chance of actually reminding you.

Well, when I was six, my dad forgot something that I like to think was pretty important. He forgot to pick me up from school. He'd been tasked specifically by my mum of getting me.

[3 : 32] And as my mum headed out the door, she was like, make sure to pick Andrew up from school. And yet much to my mum's horror, when she got home, my dad was there completely oblivious to the fact that I was standing at the school gate all alone.

He was working at home specifically to get me. He relied on his own mind and it completely slipped away. Because sometimes with the best will in the world, our minds aren't enough to remember everything that we would like to.

And I particularly learned that fact recently. Just ask my wife. I forget things for her all the time. And now I tell you that story, not because I'm so traumatized about being left at the school gate, neither because I actually quite enjoy telling that story, albeit that I do.

But tonight, Paul has two key truths in our passage that we need to remember. And these truths are right up there with some of the most important truths in the world. So important are they, that neither relying on ourselves or on our alarms are enough to help us remember.

Instead, we see that Paul instructs us that it takes a whole community of believers to just glance at verse 11 with me quickly, to encourage one another and build each other up.

[4 : 46] That's where we're going tonight. Our passage tells us that one, Jesus will return suddenly. And two, our salvation as Christians is secure.

Two fundamental truths of time that we're sandwiched in between. Two truths that call us into Christian community with each other. Two truths that call us to help one another always be ready for Jesus' return.

Let's turn to our first point together. Jesus will return suddenly. Verses 1 to 3. At some point, Jesus will descend from heaven. It's guaranteed to happen.

At some point, he will descend and the world will stop as we know it. But the Thessalonian church here seems slightly confused about exactly when that's going to happen and exactly what that means for them for the currently living on earth.

Just before our passage today, Paul addressed concerns of the church about those who had died in the church before Jesus returned. They were worried that they would not receive the promise of new life.

[5 : 53] But Paul reassured them that that was not the case in chapter 4, verse 16, saying, For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

And now in our passage today, he's moving on to what the certainty of Jesus' sudden return means for those alive on earth. Read verse 1 with me. Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates, we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

You can imagine back then, about 20 years roughly after Jesus ascended, there was lots of chat on the streets in the Christian community trying to guess, well, I think Jesus will return on exactly this date.

Whether they were people, just as we have these days, who claim to have a divine insight that God has specifically told them exactly when it will happen, or just rife speculation that ended up dominating conversations and ended up unsettling people, as it seems to have done to the church in Thessalonica.

And we still see that today to some extent. If you go on to Netflix, there are countless TV shows and documentaries that track cult leaders who convinced people that they had a divine word and when the world was going to end that the Lord supposedly disclosed to them.

[7 : 14] And yet somehow, well, obviously, it always ends in tragedy and they always get it wrong. For as Christians, we know that nobody knows when Jesus will return and that those who claim to know should be rejected and avoided.

When the disciples ask Jesus a very similar question on when he will return in Mark 13, they're told to watch out that no one deceives them for not even the angels in heaven nor Jesus the Son himself knows that time.

What we do know, though, is that he will come suddenly. And Paul gives us two images to help us know what the day of the Lord, the return of Jesus, and the judgment of the world will come like.

And Jesus used the same image as the one we have here, the image of the thief in the night when he was talking to his disciples. With the thief in the night, it's dark, so you don't see them coming until suddenly they're there and it's unexpected.

You don't anticipate being robbed. You don't get a heads up saying, oi, we're coming to your house tonight. There's no heads up in advance. You're completely unaware of what's going on until all of a sudden the thief is there and it's too late.

[8 : 25] And so, says Paul, the day of the Lord, the return of Jesus, is just like that. It will be sudden and it will be unexpected. In the second image, verse three, destruction will come on the world suddenly as labor pains on a pregnant woman and they will not escape.

The day of the Lord is unavoidable. Once labor has started, you can't go back. You can't change your mind. The world doesn't know that it's coming and once they realize it will be too late, they're oblivious to the destruction that's about to strike.

It's as sudden and unavoidable as labor pains. The destruction that comes with the return of Jesus is the wrath of God falling on all that is wrong and sinful in this world.

All the wrong and injustice to ever happen will be paid for if Christ has not already paid for it on the cross. And Paul has great certainty that that is what's coming.

We get three definitive will statements across verses two and three. The day of the Lord will come. Destruction will come on them suddenly and they will not escape.

[9 : 36] There's no doubt that Jesus will return and there will be consequences for everyone. The question is, will you face that righteous wrath for all the wrong you have done or will you accept Jesus' offer to willingly take it on your behalf?

And as Jesus returns into the world, the world will be declaring, start of verse three, there is peace and safety in the here and now.

There's nothing to fear. There's no judgment coming. Nothing worth living for beyond the peace and security you can find in this world. But they're not reliable sources.

Their claims try to persuade people not to bother trying to be in right relationship with God. saying the world can give you all the peace and security you need. So don't bother with that Christianity stuff anymore.

You don't need it. Yet while they speak, destruction will come on them suddenly and they will not see it coming and they will not avoid it. The world may declare peace and security in the here and now, but that's false.

[10 : 43] And on the day of the Lord, it will be found out. If you're craving peace and security in this world, it can only be found in the Lord Jesus. For when he returns and the world comes under righteous judgment, it is only him who can bring people through into the new creation.

Nothing else will last that day. And if you're a Christian, it's really important that you know what the truth is about Jesus' return.

Not just that he definitely will return, but also that only the Father knows when it will be and that he will bring judgment with him. Being clear on that will help us to spot the false ideology and the false teaching that we see in the world.

Saying things like, Jesus won't return, Jesus already has returned, or possibly, slightly more commonly for us, people that say, or attitudes that say, we have to transform the world to usher in Jesus' return.

that if we can just Christianize the world a little bit more, if we can work in the world as a church, then we'll get the world ready and then Jesus will return. But Paul is very clear on what we can know, that it will come suddenly, and that we don't bring it about.

[12 : 01] It's all through the work of Jesus. So with that knowledge, we should, our second point, always be ready. Verses four to eight. Paul set out what will happen to the world when Jesus returns.

But now he turns to what that means for the Thessalonians sat in the first century in Thessalonica reading this letter in the present. They need to live as who they are in light of this.

Read from verse four. But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the darkness so that this day would surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day.

We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. The church is not in darkness, ignorant of Jesus in pending return. They're not to be surprised for they are children of the light of day, not children of the darkness of night anymore.

And to be a child of the light is to know the gospel, know that one day Jesus will return and the day of the Lord will come. And to live like that, it's to believe the gospel.

[13 : 12] Only the gospel makes children of the light and anything else is darkness. And so then, verse six, as children of the light, let us not be like others who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober.

For those who sleep, sleep at night and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. The Thessalonians are to live as who they are, fully in the light of the gospel, awake to the reality that Jesus will return and bring judgment.

And living like that makes a difference. Living in contrast to the darkness, those in darkness who are asleep, are unaware of what's coming and they don't prepare. Instead, they ignore reality and Paul says they live in a drunk state.

Paul's talking about being drunk here as an example of a wider range of things, of behavior done in the darkness. Well, when you think about it, what is it that people do when they're not waiting for Jesus to return?

Well, often what we see is it's sex and it's alcohol and it's often done at night as children of the darkness. In chapter 3, verses 3 to 5, Paul's already drawn a comparison between how the Thessalonians are to live sexually and how the rest of the world does.

[14 : 29] False conceptions of this world being all there is deceives people into sinful behavior that is often the logical conclusion of the belief that there is no God who will bring justice, that there is no Jesus who is coming again.

And yet, people in the light, people who are sober, awake to the reality of Jesus' return, must live in the knowledge that the light exposes their actions. Children of the day must exhibit day behavior, being prepared for what's coming and doing things accordingly.

The Thessalonians know this. Throughout this letter, we are told they are going well despite suffering. And Paul wants to help them keep on going, being clear on how to wait well.

But more specifically, what does waiting well mean? What difference does actually Jesus' impending return make? Well, Paul tells us in verse 8, it says, that since we belong to the day, let us be sober, booting on faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Day behavior looks like booting on faith, love, and hope. It's active language, it's not passive waiting, it's armor, it's battle language, it's booting on. Faith is having confidence in what we hope for, that the return of Jesus and eternal life in perfect relationship with God and others is coming.

[15 : 56] It's a call to build up our confidence that these things really are coming and to keep pointing one another beyond this world to the one that's to come. To remind each other of the many assurances we have that God will keep his promises and he will bring about that new creation.

Love. In this letter, primarily concerns loving one another in the church. Chapter 4, verses 9 and 10, tells us that their love for Christians already exceeds just their own church and is in the whole region of Macedonia.

They need to keep loving one another because love between Christians protects against attacks. When people love you enough and are willing to say the hard things, that keeps you waiting well.

Visible expressions of love remind you that you're not in this alone, that there are lots of other people who are waiting to and want to wait alongside you. And hope, not some trivial thing that we would like to happen, but the hope of our salvation.

The frequent reminder that while living on this earth is hard and we often get it wrong in sin, that we know that we will be saved from this life into something better.

[17 : 10] Our church family that never loses sight of the coming salvation and speaks the truth into each other's lives prepares themselves to wait for Jesus' return well. Faith, love, and hope.

Three things that Paul gave thanks they had at the start of the letter. Again, this is not a rebuke or correction. It's an encouragement to keep on going. Paul wants to encourage them just as he wants them to keep encouraging each other in the exact same thing.

for when you know that something that brings destruction is going to happen and when it does, it will be sudden and unavoidable, you prepare for it. I've just gotten back from visiting my in-laws in Alaska and they are very, very used to extreme cases of weather.

In the summer, there's wildfires every summer and in the winter, there's lots of snow. It gets ridiculously cold and often you can't get out of your house. And so they prepare for it.

My in-laws have a massive garage or garage for any Americans who are confused in the room. It's packed full with canned food, bottled water and of course, after the pandemic, toilet roll.

[18 : 17] Canned food, bottled water and toilet roll. That's what they stock up on. So if the power goes down or the water goes out or they get snowed in, they are ready to survive. Every year they prepare because every winter there is extreme weather and they just don't know exactly when it's going to happen.

So it's common sense after 40 years of living in Alaska, they know what to do. It's they stock up every winter because that means that when the bad weather comes, they are always ready.

They stock up on food, water and toilet paper. We as a church stock up on faith, love and hope. Three essential things we need as a church family as we wait for Jesus to return.

Three things that we will always need to have on hand. Jesus will return suddenly, so always be ready. And as we move to our third point, know your salvation is secure.

Verses 9 to 11. As we prepare, we do so in the light of what God has done. As Paul instructs the Thessalonians to boot their armor on, he reminds them that they do so knowing that their salvation is secure.

[19 : 30] They have certainty over that. They have certain hope. For verse 9 says, God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

He died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. As they wait for the day of the Lord to come, they have no reason to worry about what will happen to them.

God has chosen them for salvation long before they were born. He has not appointed them to suffer wrath. He appointed Jesus to do that for them.

Jesus' return is still to come, but while they wait, they have real clarity on what will happen for them, for it was decided long ago by God. And the punishment for their sins that kept them from being with God has already been paid for in Jesus' death.

As Christians, we are appointed by God for salvation long before our birth. He has chosen us. Jesus has died for us.

[20 : 37] Our salvation is secure. We know that we will not suffer God's righteous wrath. And we live between two truths. Jesus has already done the work to secure our salvation.

And when he returns suddenly, we will live with him. And in the light of that, we prepare for Jesus' return. As Paul surmises his direct instruction on the day of the Lord, he brings back in the issue of Christians who have died before Jesus returned.

In chapter 4, verse 14, Paul wrote, for we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

And now in verse 10 of chapter 5, when he again talks about people being asleep and awake, he's speaking of those who are alive or dead at Christ's return. A Christian's death on earth cannot negate the salvation that God has appointed them for.

And so if that is true, what need do the Thessalonians have to fear anything? When they feel weak and insignificant in their big city where there's a massive cult temple and people are violently persecuting them, they know that God has appointed them for salvation, and even if the earth takes their life, that cannot negate their salvation.

[22 : 00] So what need do they have to fear? And for us too in Glasgow, it is unlikely that we will have to give up our lives for the gospel. But for whatever else comes, nothing of it can override our appointment for salvation that God has done.

So what need do we have to fear living for the gospel? No matter how many wars are happening, no matter how much doom and chaos we see around us, no matter how complicated family life is, no matter how difficult our battle with sin is, how long it feels, we can have real confidence that our salvation is secure in Jesus' work alone.

Living in a world that pretends that Jesus won't return is not easy. It's very easy to get caught up in the world's hope that one day we'll reach peace and safety like in verse 3 in the here and now.

Yet that hope is no hope at all. That hope just deludes from reality. But the hope of salvation relies on the eternal, all-powerful God who does everything for us.

Verse 9, God appoints us for salvation, we don't elect ourselves. We receive our salvation through Jesus, we don't earn it ourselves. Verse 10, Jesus died for us so whatever state we're in, alive or dead, we can receive it.

[23 : 24] That is real hope. Our future doesn't depend on our effort or work we put in tomorrow. It relies on the timeless, unchanging nature of our God who always keeps his promises.

And therefore, writes Paul, as he closes off this section of the letter, his direct instruction on the coming day of the Lord, in view of these two truths and the action that they call us to, he writes in verse 11, therefore, encourage one another and build each other up just as in fact you are doing.

The church in Thessalonica knew these truths already. They were ready for, despite being a little bit confused about Jesus' return. But Paul knew the value of reminding them, of encouraging them and building them up just as he calls them to do for each other.

The end of my story about being abandoned at the school gate is that my mom, every time that she left and left my dad to pick me up, would set the oven timer. If she left eight hours before I was due to be picked up from somewhere, she set the oven timer for seven hours, 55, whatever it was, to make sure that he never forgot.

So how are we going to remember the really important things in life? Not to pick up your kids from school or to meet work deadlines, but the fact that Jesus will come back suddenly and our salvation is secure.

[24 : 49] Because let's be honest, on a Monday morning, on the Groundhog Day that you may feel like tomorrow, when you're back in work, it sure doesn't feel like Jesus could return at any moment. And when you find yourself battling sin again and again, it sure doesn't feel like your salvation really is secure in God's appointment of you.

And yet these truths aren't dependent on how we feel. So how are you going to remember the really important things in life? Let me suggest to you that we can do much, much better than oven timers, phone alarms, and our own memory.

As helpful tools as they are, they are no solution whatsoever for Paul's solution here. Paul thinks it's essential not just that he tells the Thessalonians that Jesus will come back and their salvation is secure, but that they continually encourage and build each other up in light of these truths.

And so imagine what that would be like for the new Christian in Thessalonica who suffers at the hands of the world every week for being a Christian, feeling small and insecure. Imagine what it would be like the value that it would have for them to come every Sunday and meet with Christians and have those Christians remind them of these two key truths.

The immense value that that would have in their life of having those brothers and sisters who sought to help them wait well for Jesus to return. One way that we seek to do that at St. Silas for each other is through our small groups.

[26 : 21] We have groups for all ages and we would love you to join one. Whether you're not a Christian, you've been a Christian for a short while or you've been a Christian for a long time and I'd love to help you join one of them.

But imagine what it would be like to be part of a small group where we encouraged each other to wait well for Jesus' return. Wouldn't it be great to be part of a group of Christians who you knew wanted to walk alongside you and to help you?

Wouldn't it be great to get to be that person for other people, to get to follow in Paul's footsteps and help them wait well? Wouldn't it be great if everyone left our evening service feeling encouraged and built up, ready for the week ahead?

That we all felt like the conversations that we'd had before, during, and after the service were ones where people were seeking to walk with us, to help us, to encourage us.

Wouldn't that be a great feeling to have? That's what God, through Paul, wanted the Thessalonians to do, and it's what he wants us to do still today. Let's pray.

[27 : 25] Father, we praise you that you know exactly when Jesus will return, and that your timing is perfect. Thank you for sending your Son to die on the cross, that we may receive salvation through him.

Help us to wait well together as brothers and sisters united, reaching on faith, love, and hope as we wait in a world that is not our home. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. We'll respond to God's word in singing our final two songs.