

We do not belong to the night or to the darkness

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Good morning to each and every one of you to worship on this beautiful Sunday morning. It is always such a joy and privilege to share together in the Word of the Lord. Our call to worship this morning is taken from Jeremiah 29:10-14: It says, **“¹⁰This is what the Lord says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my good promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹²Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”**

Let us pray.

Opening song: Oh the Love of God - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vTuBQZDo024>

It is sometimes exceptionally difficult for us to understand exactly what the “Day of the Lord” will be like. We hear this term and all of a sudden, our imaginations run away with us. We try so hard to make sense of it all and yet still, we do not know for sure the ins and outs of what it will be like. This is probably because when we think of the Day of the Lord, we know that we are not simply speaking about one particular day but rather, a certain period of time. How often do we speak of something like *the day of our youth*? This of course does not mean that we were young for only one single day, a 24-hour period as we understand a day, but rather, we're referring to a prolonged period of time. It is the same with the Day of the Lord.

So many people throughout the centuries, Christians alike, have tried to determine when this Day will come. So many have looked at the scriptures and attempted to narrow down the Day of the Lord to a specific moment in time stating that it will happen on such a date in that particular year. How often, even in this year alone, have people looked at creation around them, the sky and the lands and the seas and all that is going on around them and come to the conclusions that these indeed must be the signs of the end of the age, the Day of the Lord or, as is referred to so often in scripture as simply that Day?

Yet scripture makes it clear that there is no use in postulating these things because quite simply, no one knows when it will be except the Father. And I believe that this is again addressed in our scripture reading this morning. **1 Thessalonians 5:1-11** says this:

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

⁴But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸But 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.

We can clearly see that the issue surrounding the Day of the Lord, that is the issue of trying to figure out exactly when it will come, does not seem to plague the Thessalonian church. Paul, I suggest, goes as far as to commend the church for their understanding of this when he says to them, **“you know very well that the Day of the Lord will come...”**. And then, in true Pauline fashion, he uses two images to describe the way in which it will come.

Firstly, he says that the Day of the Lord will come like a **thief in the night**. This I believe is such an important aspect to the coming day. We spend so much time trying to maintain a sense of control and we, at times, even carry that attempt over to the things of God. Jesus says this in Matthew 24:43, **“If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.”** This image is of course used to illustrate that we do not have control over it. When the day comes, it will come quickly and unexpectedly.

Secondly, he says that it will come suddenly, **as labour pains on a pregnant woman**. Now we must understand that while Paul acknowledges the destruction to come on that day, his focus is not on the destruction alone. Rather, I want to suggest that Paul uses this image to illustrate the surety of that day. While many people throughout the ages have tried to pinpoint the coming of the Day of the Lord to a specific date and time, equally, there are many who completely dismiss it saying that it has either come already or that it will never come. No single person looks at pregnancy and does not believe that labour will happen, and it will bring about a certain amount of pain. And this is the point, as sure as pregnancy is followed by labour, so we can be sure that the Day of the Lord will come.

Paul then moves on and makes a comparison between those who are in the darkness, also referred to those who are sleeping, and those who are in the light. And the understanding is quite simple when we look at the Day of the Lord. Two things are sure to happen: On the one hand, there will be judgement. It will be a time where God will judge, who, not simply those who do not believe but, as **2 Corinthians 5:10** tells us, all will stand before the judgement seat of Christ and answer for the things they have done whether good or bad. On the other hand, there will be a time of deliverance and blessing where salvation will be made complete and the reign of Christ's personal governance of the world will be seen.

And there is an inherent warning from Paul – do not find yourselves on the side of darkness. Do not be like those who are sleeping. Take courage, find hope in the fact that you are not simply in the light, but you are sons and daughters of the light. Our hope is in the understanding that we do not get to just gaze upon that light, we do not only see it from a distance but, as we see in Semitic languages such as Hebrew, to be the *son or daughter of* something means to be characterized by that something. This is our hope then, that we are not children of the darkness or of the night, we do not belong to it. We are the sons and daughters of the light, Christ Jesus who is the light of the world.

Therefore, let us be characterized by Him. Let us put on faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet because this is what the Lord desires of us – not that we would be doomed to face destruction, to face the wrath of His holy and righteous judgement but that we would receive salvation through Christ Jesus who suffered and died for us so that we would dwell with Him in all eternity.

Let us pray.

Song of praise: In die Hemel is die Heer - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Krup5WwShm0>

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