

Are You Prepared?

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[0 : 00] Well, thank you very much to the band and for everyone else who has already participated this evening. Let's just pray one more time before we turn to this passage.

Father, as we look to the end of time this evening, as we consider that final day, the day of the Lord. Lord, help us live our lives with a long term vision.

Help us live our lives the way you want us to live. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. One of the things I've been thinking about over the last few weeks, and one of the things that I know to be very true, I'm quite an organized person, is that people generally like to be prepared, don't they?

So you'll feel this at work, you'll feel this at home, and in almost every area of life. If you know that something is coming, something's on the horizon, you want to be ready for it.

You want to be prepared. And so, for example, in the beginning of May, Sabina and I were told that we needed to leave our apartment. The landlord needed it back, so fair enough. And in my mind, the 31st of July is a date that will bring some significant change.

[1 : 15] But instead of me sitting on that information for the last few months, I've been doing something about it. Sabina and I have been preparing for that day.

So over the last few weeks, we have been climbing over, bumping into, and packing boxes upon boxes. Packing all of our belongings ready for that day to move.

And this afternoon, we picked up the keys to our new flat. It's great. But it wouldn't make sense if we didn't think about the move until the day before it was supposed to happen, would it?

It wouldn't make sense for me to think about this sermon two minutes before I got up to speak.

Preparation is part of our everyday lives. But do we consider it to be part of our Christian life?

And that's what I want us to think about this evening. Are you prepared? Last week, Tim took us through the end of 1 Thessalonians chapter 4.

[2 : 15] And that passage was about the day that Jesus will return. Paul was teaching and is teaching the Thessalonians what will happen on that final day to believers. But specifically those who had died.

And this evening, Paul continues his teaching on that final day, on the return of Jesus. But he has a slightly different angle on it. Paul is saying that Christians should be prepared for the final day of the Lord.

The day that Jesus will return. Because that is the will of God. That we would be sanctified, made more and more into the image of Jesus.

And Paul says for Christians to be prepared, they need to know three things. Know what's coming. Know your identity. And know how to live.

So the first thing that Paul says to the Thessalonians is, Know what's coming. Verses 1 to 3. Know what's coming. So here we see the beginning of another teaching slot in this short book of 1 Thessalonians.

[3 : 21] And it starts in a similar way to the previous section. So if you glance over the page to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verse 1. And compare it with chapter 5 verse 1.

You'll see that they both have this sense that Paul is starting to teach something new. Or to clarify something. That Timothy maybe reported back to Paul as being slightly off.

Slightly ski whiff. And so in chapter 5 verse 1, Paul starts to correct and teach the Thessalonian church about times and dates of the return of Jesus.

So it appears that there were some in that church and in that city who were preoccupied with the time and date of Jesus' return. And they were just as preoccupied as there are theories today.

So I did a quick search this week and I have, in my short lifespan of 26 years, I have lived through at least 14 major theories and predicted dates of Jesus' return.

[4 : 22] 14 in 26 years. Now I think that some of the Thessalonians were looking at the persecution that seems to have begun around them.

That's referenced more in 2 Thessalonians. But they might have seen how they were becoming more and more marginalised in society. And think, surely God won't let this continue.

Surely Jesus will return. And I think when you think about that, you can kind of understand why they'd be looking and be interested in the next prediction of Jesus' return.

Similarly today, people get caught up in signs and wonders. All you need to do is go online. Check social media and you'll find almost a different prediction for any given day of the year.

People are saying that signs are happening left, right and centre. And I think that this comes from our overwhelming desire to know absolutely everything. To understand everything.

[5 : 23] If we don't understand something, we work our hardest until we do understand it. But will humanity ever really be able to understand the Almighty God?

No. Will we ever know exactly when Jesus will return? Exactly how and in exactly which sequence things will happen? Sure, in the Bible we have many indications.

But can we know for certain? No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No.

No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No.

No. No. No. No. ago we finished our morning series on the book of Joel and it spoke a lot about the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord is when Jesus will return. It is a day of blessing for his people because they will be reunited with their king but it will be a day of calamity and destruction for those who do not know Jesus. Those who reject Jesus in this life will be rejected by him on that final day. But Paul says he doesn't need to explain this because he's taught it to them before.

[6 : 49] They knew that Jesus would return and that he would come like a thief in the night. Now I don't know how much you know about thieves, maybe you have personal experience of being robbed, but from my experience they generally don't knock at your door at two in the morning and ask politely if they can come in and raid your house. No, they come in in the dead of night when nobody's expecting them, when nobody in the house is expecting any activity and they get away with all the valuables.

Paul says that this day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, meaning that the day of the Lord is unpredictable. You will not know when it is coming until it is here.

But there will be those who are expecting that day. Christians should be expecting Jesus to return. We do not know when, but we are watching and waiting for the return of our king.

And then there will be those for whom this day is a complete surprise. And on that day, those who do not know Jesus will not understand until they see him as he is.

And verse 3 says that this day of the Lord will come when people are saying peace and safety. Now peace and safety was a Roman catchphrase for the greatness of Rome.

[8 : 14] And it shows where the city of Thessalonica put their confidence and their security. So the peace of Rome was a pretty big deal. It meant that Rome controlled all of its empire by having different governors look over and after different provinces.

People could live under their own laws as long as they submitted to their Roman ruler. They submitted to their taxes and they lived under the Roman military.

So this means that the whole of the Roman Empire at its peak was safe. And the phrase peace and safety characterized the whole of the Roman Empire.

The historians today call it Pax Romana, a bit of Latin for you. Or the peace of Rome, Roman peace. People trusted Rome to protect them. They viewed the emperor as a god and worshipped him.

But what does Psalm 146 say that we began with this evening? Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings who cannot save. When their spirit departs, when they die, they return to the ground.

[9 : 24] On that very day, their plans come to nothing. But blessed is the one whose help is the God of Jacob. Whose hope is the Lord their God.

Paul is saying that Rome may protect you from earthly armies. But it will do absolutely nothing for you on the day of the Lord. For those who are unprepared, they are walking around with a false sense of security.

And when the day of the Lord comes, destruction will be upon them. There will be no escaping that day. No opportunity to flee. The day of the Lord is unpredictable like a thief in the night.

But it is also inevitable. And you see that with Paul's illustration of labor pains. When a woman's contractions start, they're an indication that the baby is getting ready to make an appearance. There's no way that the mother can stop that baby from coming. The birth is inevitable. And the day of the Lord is coming. And nothing will stop Jesus Christ returning to his bride, the church.

[10 : 34] So the day of the Lord is unpredictable, but it is inevitable. Unpredictable, but inevitable. Are you prepared? Are you preparing others for that day?

So this message is first and foremost a warning to those who are not Christians. The day of the Lord is coming. Jesus will return. We do not know when. It could be tomorrow.

It could be next year. It could be in hundreds of years. We have no idea. But it is coming. And we also don't know when we will die and meet him. And so the message of Jesus, the message of forgiveness of sins, the chance to be made right with God, to have true peace and true safety that are everlasting is not something to be put off.

Are you prepared for the return of Jesus? Will that day be a day of blessing or a day of devastation? If you do not know where you stand, please speak to somebody this evening.

Pray with the person next to you. Ask them questions because everybody who is a Christian wants to tell you about the good news of Jesus. Don't waste time, but be prepared because the day of the Lord is coming.

[11 : 56] Or maybe you are a Christian this evening. Are you preparing others for that day? If this is the end that awaits those who do not know Jesus, are we doing anything about it?

In 2015, researchers estimated that 31.2% of the world's population are Christians. You see the statistics behind me. Should that statistic make us rejoice?

Definitely. We should be glad that there are so many Christians in this world. But should that statistic put fire in our hearts? Because there are so many of the world who do not know Jesus. Absolutely. This passage encourages us to look at what has already been taught. Pick up your Bible. Read it.

See that God says time and time again that he is coming back. He will gather his people and dwell with them forever. And those who do not know him will be rejected and suffer his judgment.

[13 : 00] Are you willing to get out of your comfort zone and speak about Jesus? As Christians, we know the truth that can save people on that final day.

So why do we keep it to ourselves? And I am saying this to myself as much as I am to you. Do we talk ourselves out of sharing the gospel because we maybe feel inadequate?

Because we don't think we know all the answers. Maybe we feel we don't have time. Or we don't want to make a mess of it and turn people away from God forever.

But do we not share the gospel simply because we don't want to feel uncomfortable? Our temporary comfort in this world is of absolutely no significance to those who are perishing around us without a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Are you willing to prepare others for the day of the Lord? That day is unpredictable, but it is inevitable. Know what's coming.

[14 : 07] The second thing that Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to know is their identity. Verses 4 to 7. Know your identity.

As this passage was read out to us, maybe you notice the contrast that Paul is drawing out between followers of Jesus and those who have rejected Jesus. So Paul says that Christians are children of light and those who do not know Jesus are in darkness.

They are in darkness because they do not know the things of God. God has revealed himself to this world through creation, through the Bible and ultimately through Jesus Christ, his own son.

Yet those in darkness ignore all of these things and prefer to live as if God doesn't exist. But Christians are children of light because we have seen the truth and God has opened our eyes to see God for who he is.

In verse 4, Paul is saying that because of your identity as a Christian, you should not be surprised at the coming of Jesus. But you should be prepared and eagerly waiting for it.

[15 : 19] Why does our identity matter? Well, it matters because on that day when Jesus returns, if you are a Christian, you can have confidence, assurance.

You can know for sure that you will be with Jesus. It matters because knowing who you are should shape how you live. Not because that will make you somebody better, but because you want to glorify Jesus with your life.

Knowing your identity in Jesus should be the driving force behind how we plan our weeks. How we make decisions, how we serve others and how we shape the way we seek to grow in our love for the Lord. Our love for his word, for his church and a love for the lost. That's why we need to know our identity. And Paul is making this comparison. Have you ever made a comparison before between two things that are fundamentally different?
[16:26] I was having a conversation yesterday and someone used the phrase chalk and cheese. Or day and night, black and white. These phrases highlight the differences between two people, two worldviews, two political ideas, whatever it may be.

But that is what Paul is doing here. As children of light, as people who know Jesus and have sat under the teaching of Paul. As people who have been passed on the knowledge of the second coming.

The Thessalonian church should not be surprised when it comes. But they should be eagerly expecting it at any moment. Living in anticipation of that day.

The light has been revealed. Jesus Christ came into this world of darkness to bring light. But the Bible says that those in darkness loved the darkness instead.

Their identity as children of light should comfort them. Because it means that the day of the Lord will not be a day of destruction, but a day of celebration. And if you're a Christian, that is the same for you.

[17:36] Now up until this point in this passage, Paul has been using you language. So verse 2, you know. Verse 4, you brothers should not be surprised. Verse 5, you are children of light.

But in the second half of verse 5, Paul turns and uses we language. He's identifying with the Thessalonians. And this runs through the rest of the passage. Here you see Paul's pastoral heart for the children in the faith.

He's encouraging his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ that they share the same identity in Jesus. He is no different from them. But they have one identity.

They are united as one body under one head, Jesus Christ. The one who has revealed God to them and has brought them from darkness to light.

And so in verse 6, Paul says, As children of light, do not be like the others who sleep and who are drunk. But instead be awake and be sober.

[18:43] Now this sleep is not to be confused with the sleep that Tim was talking about last week. At the end of chapter 4, the sleep that Paul is talking about is death. And Paul uses sleep as an illustration of the temporary nature of death for Christians.

But in tonight's passage, the sleep that Paul is referring to is the attitude of those who are unaware of Jesus. Unaware of his works and unaware of his return. In short, the children of darkness are oblivious to the day of the Lord and to the ways of God.

Now I remember as a child attending a pantomime with my family. If you've been to one before, you probably remember at least one scene in the show where a character is walking around the stage, absolutely oblivious to everything that's going on, whistling away, not a care in the world.

And it's only when the whole audience, they don't let anybody sit there silently, when the whole audience screams, it's behind you. Do they turn around and realize what's coming?

Paul uses two illustrations to draw out this oblivion because the children of darkness are like that person. They do not know what's coming. And the two illustrations are sleep and drunkenness.

[20:02] Now when most people sleep, they're unaware of what's going on around them. Some people are so good at it that there could be a huge storm raging outside their window and they could sleep like a log.

When people are drunk, they lose their senses. They're not themselves. They need to concentrate on the most simple of tasks like walking. They're unaware of everything going on around them. That's what this group is like, Paul says. But do not be like them because of your identity. Be awake and alert.

So imagine a city gate with a guard standing on top on the lookout for the invading army that's just on the horizon. Always watching, always paying attention for that scout which is coming.

And then imagine a drunk man sitting on the floor just on the outside of the city gate. Not a care in the world. Doesn't care that this army is just about to come and attack the city.

[21:05] He doesn't know what's coming. Know your identity, Paul says. You are children of light. Be like that guard on the top of the city wall. Always on the lookout.

Eagerly expecting Jesus' return. Be alert and sober. Waiting and watching for that great day. Are you prepared? This is the truth for each and every person in this world.

They are either in the group characterized by sleep and drunkenness. Or in the group characterized by awakesness and being sober. Which group do you belong to?

If you're a Christian this evening, do you know your identity? Do you know who you are before God? When was the last time you thought about who you are as you stand before God?

So often we pull ourselves down and focus on our sinfulness. And that isn't wrong because we do need to know the seriousness of our sin. But don't we also need to know this awesomeness of Jesus our Savior?

[22 : 12] Robert Murray McShane said, For every look itself, take ten looks at Christ. Why? Why does the cross of Jesus matter so much?

Matthew Henry, a famous and well-known Bible commentator, says this. Come, see the victories of the cross. Christ wounds are thy healings.

His agonies thy repose. His conflicts thy conquests. His groans thy songs. His pains thine ease. His shame thy glory. His death thy life.

His sufferings thy salvation. As a Christian this evening, soak in that glorious truth. That through Jesus Christ, you have been delivered from darkness to light.

You have been declared free. Forgiven. And have been set apart by God and for God. Through Jesus Christ taking your place and your punishment.

[23 : 14] You are no longer in darkness. But now you have been called into the family of God. You have a seat at the table. Isn't that a marvelous truth?

Isn't that something that can get us excited and want to tell people about? Shouldn't that prepare us to meet our Father one day? Your identity on the day of the Lord matters.

And will determine how you spend eternity. Will you live in darkness now and forevermore? Or will you live in light now and forevermore? Will you be prepared?

I beg you. Please be prepared. And for people to be prepared for the day of the Lord. They need to know what's coming. They need to know their identity.

And lastly, they need to know how to live. Verses 8 to 11. Know how to live. The Thessalonians know their identity in Jesus. Paul has made that clear to them.

[24 : 19] But he doesn't stop there at the head knowledge level. He gives them practical advice on how to live it out. It makes no sense to know a lot of things but to not actually put any of it into practice.

Does it? We wouldn't think very highly of a doctor who knows all there is to know about the human body. Knows how to save someone in emergency but stands idly by as someone is choking to death.

Because he doesn't want to get his hands dirty. He doesn't want to put his knowledge into action. It doesn't make sense for someone to store up a load of head knowledge but to do nothing with it.

Knowing your identity in Jesus should result in your life being changed. You growing more and more into the image of Jesus Christ.

And that is done through the power of the Holy Spirit that we'll see more about next week. And so Paul gives practicalities of how to live your life as a Christian in light of the return of Jesus.

[25 : 21] Paul told the Thessalonians to wake up to their identity and now he is saying dress up for life. In verse 8. Because of our shared identity in Christ Paul says be sober.

Put on faith and love as a breastplate. And hope of salvation as a helmet. Now we've seen this triad before haven't we? In chapter 1 verse 3.

Where Paul is giving thanks for the Thessalonians and how they are living out these three qualities as a Christian. But now Paul almost weaponizes these qualities.

Paul describes faith and love as a breastplate. And the hope of salvation as a helmet. These are defensive pieces of armor. If you've ever been to London and visited Buckingham Palace.

You've probably seen a man on a horse looking at something like this. These are called the Queen's lifeguard. They have a breastplate and a helmet and usually a sword as well.

[26 : 20] Now these men will not smile at you. They will not acknowledge that you are there. They will not talk to you. They are entirely focused on their duties to protect the Queen and her estates.

These soldiers are undeterred by their surroundings because of their focus on their duties. And that is a similar kind of life that Paul is calling us to in these verses.

As a Christian your duty, your privilege because of your identity in God is to have faith and love as a breastplate. And that means faith in God and love for his people.

And all of this in light of the future day of the Lord. This is how we prepare ourselves for that final day. In all of our sufferings for the gospel. In all of our persecutions and heartaches of living in a world which hates our King.

The one thing that should stand firm is our faith in God. And we should love and support our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. And we put on the hope of salvation as a helmet.

[27 : 28] The hope that Paul is speaking about here is not the kind of hope that has no foundation. He isn't saying live out your life as best you can and then hopefully maybe God will save you on that final day.

No. And you'll see that if you turn to verse 9. But the hope of salvation is the definite, absolute, certain knowledge that on the day when Jesus returns, his people's salvation will be complete. No longer will we feel the effects of sin. No longer will we suffer in the hands of a world who hates Jesus. But verse 10 says that we will dwell with him forever.

Tell that to a brother or sister in Christ who's in a hard labour camp in North Korea. Tell that to the Christians being cut down for their faith across the globe.

Do you think that this would make a difference? Definitely. Because this truth is the one thing that keeps them going day in and day out, knowing that when Jesus returns, all of their suffering will be over and they will be reunited with their king.

[28 : 41] But we aren't in their situation. So what does this mean for us? Well, it means be alert, be prepared, know how to live now.

Take these qualities of faith, love and hope and live them out. Head knowledge will only get you so far. But when you start to live out these truths in every area of your life, people will notice that something is different.

And they will ask about why. So why does it matter for us to live this way? Because living this way will be noticeable. Living this way will give us opportunities to tell people about Jesus.

And living this way will keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. Because everything we do is done for him.

Verses 9 and 10 are a short summary of the gospel message.

So let's get practical. Why not take these verses and pray them for your non-Christian friends and family this week? Or why not take these two verses and tell them to a non-Christian friend or family member this week?

[29 : 54] Take these verses and live your life in light of them. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath. That's referring to God's final judgment.

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. And encourage and build each other up with all of these truths just as you are doing.

Those truths in verses 9 and 10. Bruntsfield Evangelical Church. Encourage and build each other up in these truths.

This evening there are so many of you here who do this without anybody noticing. You visit people in their homes. You have people around for dinner. You visit people for coffee.

You call people up. Ask them how they're getting on. You help people move house. You pray faithfully for this church family. Keep going.

[30 : 59] Do not stop. I would love it if after every single service on a Sunday, we turned to the person next to us and said, how can I pray for you this week?

How can I pray for you and encourage you in your faith, love and hope in Jesus Christ? It would be such an encouragement if after every service, we saw people praying with each other.

Living the ups and downs of life together and being alert, living in anticipation of the return of Jesus. Wouldn't that transform our church family? Wouldn't that keep us alert and sober minded and prepare us for the day of the Lord?

As we draw our service to a close this evening, let me ask you again. Are you prepared for the day of the Lord? Will that day of the Lord bring you destruction or will it bring you joy?

If you knew that Jesus was returning tomorrow, would you live differently today? That's the kind of anticipation that Paul is calling us to have and that is not easy.

[32 : 11] And we need to pray for God's help because only he is able. We need to confess our need for him, whether that's for the first time calling out for forgiveness and asking him to save us,

or whether that's for the hundredth time today, asking for his strength to endure the race until the day of the Lord.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that you have revealed yourself to us in your words.

We thank you that you have spoken to us through the Bible. Lord, I pray that as we go into life this week, as we go to work, as we go stay with the grandkids, as we play around with the kids, as we join with friends and family in the evenings, Father, would you constantly be preparing us for that final day?

Lord, would you give us opportunities this week to tell people of our identity in you and to share how they too can have the amazing opportunity to be forgiven and to be made right with you?

We ask this knowing that you are able and that you are faithful. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[33 : 34] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.