

“The Day of the Lord”
1Thessalonians 5:1-11
December 5, 2021

Have you ever been caught by surprise and found yourself woefully unprepared?

80 years ago, the residents of the northern plains were caught unprepared. March 15, 1941 was a beautiful spring day, sunny and over 30 degrees. My grandfather had let the cattle out into the pasture after a long winter. Later in the day, he sent my dad's two older brother after a couple steers that strayed further away. Then without any warning a massive blizzard of wet snow, high winds, and subfreezing temperatures struck with a vengeance (news articles report winds up to 85 miles p/hour with the temp dropping 20 degrees in 15 minutes). My dad who was 8 years old at the time, vividly remembers the roar of the wind that was so fierce, that his older sister grabbed him out of fear and ran from the house to the barn where their parents were milking. To this day, my father is amazed they were able to make it to the barn. The boys who had gone in search of the steers found themselves so overwhelmed by the wind and blinding snow that the younger put his hands in the back pockets of the older so as not to be separated from each other.

Fearing for their lives, my grandfather went in search for the boys. Just minutes after he left to look for them, they arrived at the house. Grandpa George stumbled through the snow and finally came to a neighboring farm where he got more clothes and continued the search. At one point, he thought he had arrived at the orchard just behind the house where they had put banana boxes over the new trees to protect them from the rabbits. However, he was disappointed to discover that he was actually in the cemetery having been fooled by the tombstones. Eventually he made it home, and all of the Spensst family was spared that day. But many people died in that storm, some just inches from safety.

Just as the residents of ND and Northern MN were taken by surprise by this Alberta Clipper on a seemingly peaceful spring day, so the world will be taken by storm with what Scripture calls the day of the Lord.

The Day of the Lord, also called the day of God's vengeance, is *that great and terrible day when Yahweh will intervene to punish the wicked and save the righteous*. The term Day of the Lord is used 19 times in the OT and 4 Times in the NT. There are times when the Day of the Lord is used in reference to historic moments of judgment on specific nations, like Assyria. Yet there are references that also point to a future climactic day of cataclysmic and catastrophic destruction that will bring total deformity to the earth.

Let me give you a sampling of how Scripture describes the Day of the Lord:

- Isa 2:12 – “the LORD of hosts will have a day *of reckoning* Against everyone who is proud and lofty, And against everyone who is lifted up, That he may be abased.”
- Isa 13:6-13 – “Wail, for the day of the LORD is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will fall limp, And every man's heart will melt. And they will be terrified, Pains and anguish will take hold of *them*; They will writhe like a woman in labor, They will look at one another in astonishment, Their faces aflame. Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises, And the moon will not shed its light. Thus I will punish the world for its evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud, And abase the haughtiness of the ruthless. I will make mortal man scarcer than pure gold... Therefore I shall make the heavens tremble, And the earth will be shaken from its place At the fury of the LORD of hosts In the day of His burning anger.
- Joel 2:1-3 – “Blow a trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, For the day of the LORD is coming; Surely it is near, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness.... **The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, And who can endure it?...** Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “Return to Me with all your heart,

And with fasting, weeping, and mourning; And rend your heart and not your garments." Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, And relenting of evil.

- 2Peter 3:9-12 – “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

This unimaginable day of judgment, cataclysmic and catastrophic beyond anything that this world has ever seen, will come upon this unexpectant world like a tsunami. And the only way to be saved and not destroyed by the wrath to come, is to heed the warnings of Scripture to rend our hearts and be reconciled to God through the wrath-absorbing sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Paul addresses the day of the Lord in 1Thess 5 as a means of encouragement to believers. ***As we live lives of faith, hope, and love in union with Christ, we can be confident that we are destined for salvation and not for wrath on the day of the Lord which will come suddenly upon the unexpectant world.***

3 essential realities concerning the coming Day of the Lord:

1. **The cataclysmic judgment of God will come suddenly on an unexpectant world** (1Thess 5:1-3).

[vs. 1-3] A thief comes when you don't expect him. He sneaks up on you, suddenly and without warning. So it will be that the day of God's judgment will take the world by surprise because they will not be anticipating a day of reckoning. Rather they will be promoting the delusion that they have no divine consequences to fear. The world has dismissed the fear of God and is proudly living as through He does not exist. In the name of human progress, the world cries, "peace and safety" not knowing that they are fattening

themselves for the day of slaughter. The cry of peace and safety in vs. 3 is likely a reference to Jeremiah 6:14 and 8:11 where the Lord is rebuking the prophets and priests who have "healed" his people superficially saying, "peace, peace" where there is no peace. Because they were not ashamed, and did not even blush at their abomination, the Lord promises to punish them.

When vs. 3 says that God's reckoning will come upon them like labor pains to a woman, it means that it will not only come suddenly, but painfully and inevitably. There is a point at which no one can keep that baby from coming. [Cheryl; African]

In the same way, God's judgment on the rebellious world will be unavoidable and inescapable.

The suddenness and severity of the day of the Lord should awaken us to the sobering horror of sin. Christianity is not about niceties. When we talk about forgiveness, we are talking about forgiveness of sin that is otherwise eternally damning. The holy fury and terror of God against sin, evil, and pride is beyond our comprehension. Yet God has made a way through the cross to escape this fury. How tragic that we should take such grace lightly.

2. **Believers will be prepared for the unexpected day of the Lord by living lives of faith, hope, and love** (1Thess 5:4-8).

[vs. 4-8] Paul begins vs. 4 with an emphatic contrast: "*But you, brethren* are not in darkness that the day should overtake you like at thief." Paul is drawing a categorical line between the unprepared world that will be swept into the tsunami of God's judgment and the believers who will not be unprepared for that day of reckoning. Vs. 5: "For you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness."

Darkness or night represents the dominion of sin, the shackles of sin that prevent someone from fleeing the wrath of God. Light as to do with God's revelation and presence. Perhaps the best way that we could summarize Paul's point here is with the words of Eph 5:8: "you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light." In Christ, your life is no longer defined by the darkness of sin. You *are* light in the Lord.

“God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1Jn 1:5). So if you are in Christ, you too are light.

Paul’s point both in Eph 5:8 and here in 1Thess 5 is that because we *are* light, we should live in the light. In other words, “*act what you are.*”¹ Believers, instead of allowing your fickle actions to question your true identity in Christ, use your new identity in Christ to inform your actions.

Vs. 6: “So then let us not sleep as the others do, but let us be alert and sober (self-controlled).” Paul is using the language of alcoholic intoxication to illustrate the immoral intoxication of sin. In other words, don’t fall back into the stupor of this world. Don’t let the clarity of spiritual reality be blurred in your vision. Don’t live as though you still belong to the night of sin. Live and walk in the light! Exercise self-control that is empowered by the Spirit’s presence in your life. Be clear-headed about your life in this world. Live in the fear of God with confidence in the grace of God.

In particular, Paul calls us to demonstrate that we are walking in the light by living lives of faith, hope, and love. Vs. 8: “*But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.*” Earlier in 1:3, Paul commended the Thessalonians for their work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope. Paul often uses this triad of faith, hope, and love to describe the evidence of spiritual life in a believer. (standard operating procedure)

In Isaiah 59:17, God Himself is pictured as a warrior wearing a breastplate of righteousness and a helmet of salvation on His head. The context of Isaiah 59 is that God sees that there is no one to exact justice on the earth, and therefore He Himself will dress for war and bring justice to bear for the oppressed. Remember, the Thessalonians themselves are being severely persecuted, perhaps even disillusioned thinking that they may be experiencing God’s wrath. But Paul assures them that they are not under God’s wrath as children of light. And their only protection in this harsh world is to live by faith, to cling to the hope of Christ’s coming deliverance, and to love one another and all people with very character of God by which they have been loved and redeemed.

Paul is calling the Thessalonians (and us) as we await the coming of Christ, to persist in lives of faith, hope, and love knowing that however hard life may be, we are not destined for wrath but for a great salvation on the day of the Lord. This leads us to our final point...

3. **Believers are destined, not for wrath, but for salvation on the day of the Lord** (1Thess 5:9-11).

[vs. 9-11] It’s Important that we don’t confuse the wrath of this world or the circumstances of this life with the wrath of God. I cannot make any promises about what you will or will not have to endure through life on this earth. But we can hold on to the promise, that in the end, our final destination as believers is not the wrath of God but the salvation of God. And our confidence in this promise is anchored in the gospel.

Vs. 10: [Jesus] died for us...” We are not destined for wrath because Christ took the wrath of God for our sin on the cross. And having absorbed all of the wrath for those who trust in Him, He saved us and rose from the dead to guarantee that whether we live until the second coming of Christ or die before He comes, we will live together with Him. Life with God is our destination.

Therefore, Paul says, encourage one another and build one another up. Remind each other who you are—children of light. Encourage each other to live what you are, to walk in the light. Remind each other of the assuredness of the gospel—we are not destined for wrath but for obtaining salvation in Jesus. God will judge the evil of this world with perfect justice. Those who cause us suffering will not escape their accounting. So we are free to keep living lives of faith, hope, and love until Jesus comes.

As we prepare for the Lord’s table, we remember that Jesus came at Bethlehem to bring light into the dark world (Isa 9: “The people who walk in darkness shall see a great light, those who live in a dark land (the shadow of death), the light will shine on them. But we also remember that Jesus will come again to deliver us out of this dark world to forever live in the light of His presence eternally. (Rev 22:5: “And there shall no longer be *any* night;

¹ Gene Green, “*The Letters to the Thessalonians*” (Pillar series), pg. 238.

and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever.”)

Are you ready for the day of the Lord? “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). That is, the day of God’s vengeance looms over you, like a tsunami, if you haven’t taken refuge in the cross-work of Jesus. But if you who believe in Christ, you can obey Him and walk in the light regardless of the cost in this life, because you are destined to eternal life.

As we prepare for the Lord’s table, the Spirit calls us to take an assessment of our lives. Are we walking in the light as children of light? Let’s invite the Lord to search our hearts and to expose any darkness that we need to confess to Him today.

Communion

Bread: God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.

Jesus said, I am the Light of the world, He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life. (Jn 8:12)

Cup: Not destined for wrath because Jesus shed His blood and took upon Himself the holy fury of God’s judgment against sin.