

9. The day of the Lord

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The Day of the Lord begins with night because that is God's way of marking time. He begins that way in Genesis 1:5 where it says that the evening and the morning were the first day. God begins from pitch darkness but made light. So does the dark Great Tribulation lead into the glorious millennial reign of Christ.

Initially, it is important to understand that our curiosity about prophecy and the future is God-given. According to Solomon's Ecclesiastes 3:11, the Lord has placed eternity in our hearts. He has created us with a hunger that only His truth can satisfy. God's complete plan for the ages is always just beyond our reach.

We are in danger when we begin speculating about aspects of prophecy that are supposed to be unclear for now. Those who leave little room for mystery leave lots of room for mistakes.

Faith in Jesus Christ not only unites us to other believers; it also separates us spiritually from the rest of the world. Jesus said, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" in John 17:16. There is a difference between believers who are looking for the Lord's return and the people of the world who are clueless and careless.

The apostle's purpose was to encourage believers to live holy lives in the midst of their pagan surroundings. He did this by pointing out the contrasts between believers and unbelievers.

A. SURPRISE, SURPRISE, SURPRISE

1 Thessalonians 5:1-5 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.

What is your interpretation of this?

The word for "time" is the Greek 'chronos', from which we get our English word 'chronology'. The times and seasons or the chronology are not for the church to know.

The Lord Jesus does not come to the church like a thief in the night. Even though we may not know the time or date of His rapture for the church, but the church is looking for and waiting for the Lord to come.

But the Lord Jesus does come like a thief to the unbelieving world after the church has been raptured. As I have said, the Day of the Lord will come suddenly to the earth, and it will begin the dark Great Tribulation period. Then after 7 years, Christ will come back personally to this earth with His saints from heaven.

Our Lord used this image in His own teaching in Matthew 24:42-43 and Luke 12:35-40. It describes the suddenness and the surprise involved in the coming of the

day of the Lord. In Revelation 3:3 and 16:15, He used this image to warn believers not to be caught napping. Since we do not know when the Lord will return for His people, we must live in a constant attitude of watching and waiting, while we are busy working and witnessing.

Now we can put these concepts together and discover what Paul wanted to teach his troubled friends in Thessalonica. He had already told them about the coming of Christ for the church, the event described in the last chapter. He had told them that there would be a period of intense suffering and tribulation on the earth following this rapture of the church. These "times and seasons" that relate to Israel and the nations do not apply to the church or affect the truth of the Lord's coming for the church. He may come at any time, and this will usher in the day of the Lord.

Paul's emphasis here was simply that the believers were "in the know," while the unbelievers were living in ignorance of God's plan. The suddenness of these events will reveal to the world its ignorance of divine truth.

Did you notice the change of pronouns in v3? The pronouns were "brethren," and "you" in the first two verses are changing to "they." Paul now refers to unbelievers who remain on earth after the Rapture. Glad that the Christian influence is finally gone, they will follow the antichrist and his scheme to rule the world. I am sure that their banners and slogans will enthusiastically portray the dawning of a new day of "peace and safety." Then, with swift terror, destruction will come.

Because unbelievers live in the darkness of spiritual ignorance, they are unaware of the disaster that awaits them. But Christians live in the light of truth.

The Rapture of the church actually does two things:

- 1) It ends this Day of Grace in which people are calling out His name and bringing many people to glory.
- 2) It begins the Day of the Lord. The Great Tribulation will get underway when the church leaves the earth.

It closes one day and opens another.

Paul compared the coming judgment to "*as labor pains upon a pregnant woman*" in v3. Even with our modern medical skills, I was told that labor pains are very real and very painful. The prophet Isaiah used this same picture when he described the coming "day of the Lord" in Isaiah 13:6-13. The early part of this day of the Lord was called "*the beginning of sorrows*" by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 24:8; and the Greek word translated "sorrows" actually means "labor pains."

What truth do Isaiah, Jesus, and Paul teach us? The truth that out of the day of the Lord will come the birth of the kingdom. When God's judgments are finished, God's Son will return with power and great glory. Paul described this event in his second letter to the Thessalonian Christians.

Our Lord wants us to live expectantly. This does not mean that we quit our job and sit on our roofs and wait for the rapture to happen any day. That is the very attitude our Lord told us not to do through the angel in Acts 1:10-11. But it does mean living in the light of His return, realizing that our works will be judged and that our opportunities for service on earth will end. It means to live "with eternity's values in view."

There is a difference between being ready to go to heaven and being ready to meet the Lord. Anyone who has sincerely trusted Christ for salvation is ready to go to heaven. Christ's sacrifice on the cross has taken care of that. But to be ready to meet the Lord at the judgment seat of Christ is quite another matter. Scripture indicates that some believers will not be happy to see Jesus Christ because they choose to live under the carnal world's influence.

1 John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

Believers who live in the expectation of the Lord's return will certainly enjoy a better spiritual life than Christians who compromise with the world.

C. BE READY, BE SOBER FROM THE WORLD

1 Thessalonians 5:6-11 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. 11 Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

Please give me your interpretation of this portion.

Jesus taught us about the ten virgins who were part of the wedding party. Five of them were ready, but the other five were not according to Matthew 25:

Matthew 25:6-13 And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' 7 Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' 10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. 11 Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' 12 But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

In Jesus' day, although the day of a wedding was known in a community, the exact hour was unknown. The bridegroom could show up at his bride's house any time during the day or night. He could come in the morning, at noon, even at midnight. When the groom arrives at the bride's home, he takes the bride with a procession of ten bridesmaids back to his home where the wedding ceremony and feast are waiting.

The five foolish virgins appeared to be prepared for the bridegroom because they had their lamps. However, without the oil that represents the Holy Spirit, the virgins were not really ready for the bridegroom. In this case, Jesus is the bridegroom and He is coming back to take His church which is His bride to heaven.

If the rapture happens this coming Sunday morning during our service, I fear that some of the people in the sanctuary may be left behind. They will be still sitting here while the rest of us go up to heaven with Jesus. Yes, they've been hanging out with the wedding party, but there is no oil in their lamp. Being religious and being a good person doesn't mean anything according to the Bible.

I asked you to underline verses 8 and 9. Salvation cannot be transferred from one person to another. It is not something like a reverse osmosis system that a person hangs around a born-again believer long enough, then that person gets to gain entry to heaven. No, it is done only by individual choice.

A lot of people get drunk on power or the making of money, or the pleasures of this world. The child of God is to stay sober and is to watch. Why? Because it is extremely easy for any Christian to fall into the traps of satan who tries his best to ensnare us.

I see this often as some born-again Christians who set their five-year goal to be something or making money that they forget God. It even happens to some churches which get into a building project so much that they forget that the church is supposed to do. Their priorities get all blurred that they choose not to see God's direction. They are not sober-minded.

To be sober-minded means to be alert, to live with your eyes open, to be safe and steady. To make the contrast more vivid, Paul pictured two groups of people: one group was drunk and asleep, while the other group was awake and alert. The danger was coming, but the drunken sleepers were unaware of it. They are like drunken men, living in a false paradise and enjoying false security.

The hope of salvation means "the hope that salvation gives to us." There are actually three tenses to salvation:

- 1) Past – I have been saved from the guilt and penalty of sin – Justification
- 2) Present – I am being saved from the power and pollution of sin – Sanctification
- 3) Future – I shall be saved from the very presence of sin when I get to heaven. – Glorification

This is another evidence of the Pre-Tribulation doctrine. Yes, it has been said, "Trials and tribulations are not an elective class in the Christian life, but a required course." But they will not go through the Great Tribulation wrath of God that is appointed for the godless world.

Mormon people believe that they would go through the Tribulation of some sort. That is why they always have emergency foods, hide-out shelter, and weapons ready in their homes.

We must never permit the study of prophecy to become purely academic, or a source of tension or argument. Paul closed this section with the practical application of the prophetic Scriptures: encouragement and edification. The fact that we will meet our loved ones again and forever be with the Lord is a source of encouragement, and the fact that we will not endure God's wrath during the day of the Lord is another source of encouragement. The first is positive, and the second is negative, and both are comforting.

D. APPLICATION

The truth of our Lord's imminent return encourages us to keep clean and to do faithfully whatever work He has assigned to us. It also encourages us to attend church and love one another. Knowing that we shall be with the Lord strengthens us in the difficulties of life and motivates us to win the lost.