

Returning!  
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1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

In His Sovereignty, God has not allowed us to know the future. If He gave you the option to know the future, would you take it or prefer not to know? Why?

In these verses, Paul continued his instruction to the church about the promised return of Christ to earth to claim His followers (the rapture.) They wondered WHEN Christ would return. People are still debating the WHEN, but Paul was more focused on the “HOW” and “WHAT.” HOW Christ-followers should live and WHAT we should be doing in anticipation of His return.

Here’s the truth that should change us: When Christ returns we shouldn’t be dozy and distracted; He should find us watching, waiting, working, and witnessing.

**1** Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. **2** For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

- The second coming of Christ will happen in two parts: the rapture when He takes His followers away, then His final return to judge evil and set up His Kingdom. There will also be seven years of tribulation.
- His return is a classic good news/bad news reality -- blessings for His followers and judgment and wrath for those who have rejected Him.
- That reality should motivate the Church to evangelism and good works.
- Instead, we hear speculation and debate about the timing of these events.
- Pastor Bob Utley stated, *“I think the second coming is meant to be an impetus for godliness and we’ve turned it into something to fight about and split the church. Isn’t that typical of Western Christians?”*
- Will the rapture happen before the tribulation, in the middle of it, after?
- Based on verse two, how would Paul answer all the debates about timing?
- Verse 4 says, “But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.” Scripture says clearly no one knows the timing.
- It’s not bad to study about Christ’s return but are we missing the point?
- This made me think of TV meteorologists. When we have bad storms have you noticed how excited they are about it? We’re scared and they seem absolutely giddy about their advanced radar tracking systems.
- I’m grateful for how the technology can save lives but it’s not about counting lightning strikes or precisely predicting WHEN the storm will come down your street; the real point is to get to safety! Tornado sirens actually get that job done pretty simply. You hear the loud sound and you take cover. I just need to know the storm is coming so I can get to safety.
- We know Jesus is coming back, we just need to take action on that.

- Instead of arguing about the timing of Christ's return, Paul says we should focus on living in anticipation of His return.

• Verse three describes the sad reality for those who have rejected Christ:  
**3** While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

- *"The Roman Empire used the phrase "peace and safety" in its propaganda to promote the idea of Roman Peace (Pax Romana)"<sup>i</sup>*
- Governments promising "peace and safety" is not a new concept.
- Many people think human institutions can deliver "peace and safety." If they've rejected Christ, not only will they will be surprised by His return, they "will not escape" the judgment and wrath to come. They will have missed their chance. That's why we urgently need to share the gospel.
- Some ask if anyone will be saved after the rapture? Scholars debate that.<sup>ii</sup>
- My simplistic opinion: Why take a chance? Take cover before the storm!

**5** For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. **6** So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. **7** For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night.

- "Children of light" – *"In this context, light symbolizes God's favor toward those who will be spared from His judgment."<sup>iii</sup>*
- As "children of light" we need to "not sleep" but "keep awake and sober."
- When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor some claimed they chose Sunday morning thinking the soldiers, sailors, and airmen would be sleeping and hung over from Saturday night. The official investigation revealed the real issue was that America was simply unprepared.<sup>iv</sup>
- We call that being "asleep at the switch." [A railroad expression]
- Paul challenges Christ-followers to be alert. Look at verse eight:

**8** But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

- Two weeks ago I posed the question: *"If we knew Christ was coming back on Friday, how would we live this week?"* Let's talk about that.
- Paul's words in verse eight are similar to the "armor of God" described in Ephesians six. A soldier on guard duty can't afford to get sleepy.
- They also can't go to their post without protective gear.
- Our protective gear is "faith, hope, and love." One commentator wrote: *"Faith is that certain knowledge of God, his promises and salvation; love is a yielding to God in joyful obedience; and hope, which looks to the future, is an assurance of salvation which goes hand in hand with obedience."<sup>v</sup>*

- What does it look like to live anticipating Christ's return?
- Step one is to trust Christ as Savior and Lord before He returns.
- In Matthew 25 Jesus told the parable of ten virgin bridesmaids waiting for the bridegroom. They had one job: keep their lamps burning for the celebration when the bridegroom comes. Five were wise and stocked up on oil. Five were unwise and didn't. What happened to them? <sup>12</sup> But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' <sup>13</sup> Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.<sup>vi</sup>
- That's a picture of being truly saved versus being religious but not saved.
- The oil represents the Holy Spirit living in the heart of Christ-followers.
- The most important preparation for Christ's return is to trust Him as Savior and Lord.
- Later in Matthew 25 Jesus shared the parable of the "talents."
- The point of that parable is working diligently for the Master until He returns so we can hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."<sup>vii</sup>
- First, I must be saved; second, I must be working diligently for Jesus.
- Did your Mom ever leave you a list of chores to complete before she returned home? What are some of the "chores" Christ expects of us?

**Matthew 24:42 (NLT) — 42** "So you, too, must keep watch! For you don't know what day your Lord is coming." - *We must be WATCHING and WAITING.*

**John 9:4 (NLT) — 4** We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. The night is coming, and then no one can work. - *We must be WORKING. What does that look like?*

**2 Peter 3:14 (NLT) — 14** And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight. **18** Rather, you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ... - *We must strive to live Christ-like lives by knowing Him through His word and obeying it to be more like Him.*

**Matthew 28:19–20 (NLT) — 19** Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. **20** Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you... - *We must be WITNESSING.*

- Other thoughts?

So, What's the Takeaway?

- When Christ returns will He find us dozy and distracted or will we be watching, waiting, working, and witnessing?
- I like this practical description of what that looks like from Warren Wiersbe: *"The sober-minded believer has a calm, sane outlook on life. He is not complacent, but neither is he frustrated and afraid. He hears the tragic news of the day, yet he does not lose heart. He experiences the difficulties of life, but he does not give up. He knows his future is secure in God's hands, so he lives each day creatively, calmly, and obediently. Outlook determines outcome; and when your outlook is the uplook, then your outcome is secure."*<sup>viii</sup>
- Verses 9-11 leave us with this encouragement for all Christ-followers:

**9** For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, **10** who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. **11** Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

- This week as we consider Christ's return let's not get dozy or distracted. Instead, let's be watching, waiting, working, and witnessing.

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<sup>i</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (1 Th 5:3). Bellingham, WA:

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/second-chance-rapture.html>

<sup>iii</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (1 Th 5:5). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://pearlharbor.org/unprepared-for-attack-december-7-1941/>  
<https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,859258,00.html>  
<https://time.com/6124756/pearl-harbor-world-war-ii-myths/>

<sup>v</sup> Shenton, T. (2006). *Opening up 1 Thessalonians* (p. 99). Leominster: Day One Publications.

<sup>vi</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Mt 25:12–13). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>vii</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Mt 25:21). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>viii</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 184). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.