

Ready Player One

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1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Bland Mason

TEXT 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. 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. ⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. 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. 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. 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.

INTRODUCTION

- Have you ever known someone who sleepwalks? It is kind of bizarre thing to encounter. Here is this person walking around and possibly talking but in reality, they are completely oblivious to what is happening.
- Early on in ministry I was a youth minister. I took a group of youth on a trip. And there was a youth named Aubrey staying in my room. His mom warned me ahead of time that he sometimes he would sleepwalk, and talk to you, and even left their home one night so I needed to keep an eye out. Well, the first night, I awoke to someone pulling the blanket right off my bed. It took me a few seconds to wake up enough to realize what was happening. Aubrey was pulling the blanket right off my bed. And sure enough he got it off and was walking toward the door with it. I called out to Aubrey, "What are you doing?" And he responded "Nina is cold" -Nina was a girl in the youth group. So I jumped out of bed as he got to the door and managed to wake him up. He looked at me and said, "Oh, man..."
- That's a funny story but sleepwalking can be serious but what happens if you are sleepwalking through life? What if you are walking and talking but when it comes down to it you are oblivious to what is really happening. Sleepwalking through school. Sleepwalking through your job. Sleepwalking through the endless repetitive of habit of get up, go to work or school, come home, eat, sleep, repeat.
- In our passage today, Paul is warning us against apathy and indifference about eternal things. He is warning us against letting complacency take root in us and those around us. He wants us to live lives that are READY to meet Jesus. Lives that make a difference by honoring Jesus in every part of our life. He is trying to prepare us all for when we face Christ, when he returns.
- Paul calls us to live in 3 ways –live ready; live true to your identity; live together b/c it matters.

1. Live ready because Christ is coming soon. (5:1-3)

- Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. – Paul opens by acknowledging that the Thessalonians have already been taught about the timing of Christ's return. He uses two Greek terms for time: **chronos** (chronological time) and **kairos** (appointed times or seasons). Here the phrase "times and seasons" means essentially all aspects of future timing.
- Paul doesn't give a date or new information-instead, he reminds them of what they already know: **For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.**
- So, the Thessalonians had previously had questions about the resurrection. There are Christian friends and family in the Thessalonian church who had died and there were questions about

where they were. There were some who were suggesting that the resurrection had already happened. But last week we saw Paul reassured them of the resurrection hope and that those who had died in Christ would actually be raised to be with Christ before those who are still alive when he comes again.

- Now, Paul wants to remind them, “hey, you don’t need me to give you some random dates and times. You already know what the day of the Lord will be like!”
- What is this “Day of the Lord?” It isn’t a literal 24 hour day but a period where Jesus returns, judges the world, and ushers in his perfect rule and reign with his people. And it happens in God’s timing, not ours.
- “Like a thief in the night” – this echoes Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 24:42-44. How do thieves come? Do they announce their arrival? Do they send a text message? Do they email you? NO. They show up unexpected. So the Day of the Lord will show up in an unexpected time but that doesn’t mean the Day of the Lord is unexpected by Jesus’ followers.
- Paul says, “While people are saying, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them...”
- He’s exposing the lie we still love to believe—that as long as life feels stable, we’re safe. In Paul’s day, “peace and security” was Rome’s slogan. Today, it might be: career’s cruising, rent’s paid, vacation’s booked—so everything’s fine, right?
- But Jesus warned in Matthew 24: it was the same in Noah’s day. Life seemed normal... until the rain started. And by then, it was too late to build a boat.
- Paul isn’t condemning ordinary life. He’s warning us not to ignore ultimate reality. You can’t prepare for eternity *after* it breaks in.
- He compares it to labor pains. No one schedules them. But no 9-months-pregnant woman is shocked when they start. In the same way, the Day of the Lord will come—sudden, irreversible, and inescapable.
- And here’s the hard truth: God’s judgment isn’t just for the “really bad” people. He doesn’t grade on a curve. His standard is His perfect, holy character. We’re quick to want justice for child abusers and corrupt CEOs. But what about the selfishness in *our* hearts—the pride, apathy, and quiet cruelty that lives in us?
- Let’s be honest. None of us loves God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. None of us loves our neighbor as ourselves. So who among us really thinks we’re exempt?
- But here’s the invitation: you don’t have to face that day unprepared. Jesus offers you rescue, not wrath. He faced the judgment we deserve, so that when the Day of the Lord comes, you’re not running for an exit—you’re running into His arms.
- So the question is: Are you awake? Or are you spiritually sleepwalking through life? Today is the day to wake up, repent, and receive the grace of Jesus. Before it’s too late.
- For the Thessalonians Paul’s point isn’t “you should be freaked out.” He says **you yourselves are fully aware**. And then he goes on to comfort them because the Day of the Lord is not a threat to the Thessalonians but the fulfillment of their hope.

2. Live true to who you are in Christ. (5:4-8)

- Paul’s call beyond living ready is to live true to your identity in Christ. **“But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.”**
- Here Paul draws a bold line of contrast: “but you...” Unlike the sleeping world, Christians live in a different sphere. To be “in darkness” in Scripture means to be apart from God’s truth and holiness – trapped in ignorance, evil, and spiritual shadow. By God’s grace, these Thessalonian believers have been rescued from darkness and into the light of Christ.

- 1 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But it isn’t just an individual experience. There is a change of domain or state of living...
- Colossians 1:13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son... Paul is saying “because you are children of light, children of the day” you have nothing to fear!
- Paul is naming something deep here—our truest identity. In the Bible, to be a “child of” something means you’re shaped by it, marked by its nature. So when he calls us “children of light” and “children of the day,” he’s saying that we now belong to the kingdom of clarity, purity, and salvation.
- We’re not just dabbling in the light—we *belong* to it. We didn’t earn this identity. We didn’t pay for it. We don’t even deserve it, but because of what Jesus has done, the light is our home now. And just as surely, we no longer belong to the night. We’ve been delivered from the shadows of sin, from the spiritual fog of Satan’s domain. Light and darkness don’t mix—ever. Even the faintest candle pushes back a whole room of darkness. That’s who we are now: people whose very presence carries the light of Christ into the darkest corners of this world.
- So Paul ties our security not to our activity but to our identity.
- v.6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. Since we belong to the day, we must live like it. Paul uses two present-tense commands: “let us keep awake” and “let us be sober.” These complement each other.
- First, “not sleep” is meant metaphorically – Paul isn’t forbidding taking literal naps! In fact, for some of you in here, the most spiritual thing you could do is to take a nap. But He’s talking about spiritual lethargy. Just as someone who is asleep is unaware of reality, a person spiritually asleep is indifferent to God, inattentive to moral and eternal realities.
- In 1 Thess 4, Paul used “sleep” as a euphemism for physical death; here he deliberately uses a different Greek word for “sleep” to mean spiritual apathy . He’s warning against the kind of complacency that characterizes “those who are in the darkness” spiritually. We must not allow ourselves to be lulled into spiritual apathy – the comfortable numbness that can come from routine, material comfort, or distraction.
- Instead, we are to be awake and alert like a good soldier on duty. Greek word “keep awake” is “gregoreo” literally means to stay watchful or alert (it’s the root of the name Gregory, meaning “watchful one”). It implies an active, attentive stance.
- He also says, “we should be sober” – this is literal and figurative! Literally, we are to NOT be drunk. Thessalonica’s patron deities included gods like Dionysus, the wine god. His cult’s festivals were notorious night-long parties with heavy drinking and sexual revelry. I feel like we have our own versions here in Boston don’t we? And drunkenness dulls us to ultimate reality.
- But it isn’t just literal sober-mindedness. It points to self-control, clarity of mind, and steadiness. A sober person isn’t fuzzy-headed or carried away by passions; they exercise sound judgment and discretion. Paul is calling the church to moral and mental sobriety: a serious, steadfast outlook that isn’t intoxicated by the world’s indulgences. This doesn’t mean joyless, it means to possess the proper weight of priorities. It means “I know what matters.”
- In our context, we might say: don’t get “drunk” on entertainment, success, or the latest craze to the point that you lose sight of God. Keep your heart and habits in check.
- vv.7-8 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. 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.

- Using the language of armor, Paul describes how believers can stay protected and prepared. In contrast to revelers who shed self-control at night, Christians are likened to soldiers who gear up for battle. Paul says “having put on” (indicating they should do this and presumably have done this as believers) two pieces of defensive armor: a breastplate covering the chest/heart and a helmet covering the head.
- The breastplate is made of faith and love, and the helmet is the hope of salvation. These three virtues – faith, love, and hope – are a hallmark of Paul’s teaching (he praised the Thessalonians for their “work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope” in 1:3). Now he returns to them as the spiritual armor that will guard them in the present age.
- Paul is essentially urging them: equip yourselves daily with trust in God, active love, and a confident hope in your salvation. These qualities will defend you against the spiritual dangers of the night. With hearts guarded by faith and love, and minds guarded by hope, we can stay spiritually awake without fear.
- Is that you? Is that me? Would we describe ourselves as spiritually “awake and alert”? Are we “gregoreo” or are we lulled into apathy and spiritual sleepwalking? Do you have the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of salvation?
- In a city culture like ours, it’s easy to get caught in a monotonous cycle – work, Netflix, sleep, repeat. Paul’s call to be “children of the day” challenges us to infuse our daily lives with purpose and God’s presence.

3. Live together today like it matters eternally. (5:9-11)

- ⁹For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.
- What a powerful comfort Paul gives after calling us to stay awake and alert: *God has not appointed us for wrath, but for rescue*. While the world stumbles in darkness toward sudden destruction, our future is secure. God’s wrath—His just judgment against evil, sin, and rebellion—is real. But for those in Christ, it’s already been dealt with. At the cross, Jesus took that judgment for us.
- Paul says our destiny isn’t punishment, but salvation—something we receive, not earn. Important to hear today- It’s not our spiritual vigilance that saves us; it’s Jesus. He died in our place. That’s the heart of our hope. The cross didn’t just change our past; it secured our future.
- So the Day of the Lord isn’t a threat for believers—it’s our great liberation. No fear. No condemnation. Romans 8:1 – “there is therefore now NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” For those who belong to Jesus God only has grace upon grace.
- v. 11 **Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.** Paul concludes this section with a call to mutual encouragement! The word encourage means to “comfort, console, to exhort, or urge”. It’s a beautifully nuanced term – essentially coming alongside someone to help.
- This is what is to happen in CGs. Community groups aren’t a bible study group aimed at simply gaining all the biblical knowledge it can. It is a community meant to encourage each other, call each other to be sober-minded and alert; a community meant to infuse courage into each other as children of the light living a dark world.
- This happens not at one CG meeting but in meeting week after week, month after month, year after year. Paul says we are to also “**build one another up**” - the image here is of construction: the Greek word means to build a house or structure. It implies a gradual, continuous process – brick by brick. A single act doesn’t finish a building; it takes many actions over time and building up someone else isn’t a one-time act.
- So, week after week you add a brick to someone else’s life. If you go to CG to see what you will get out of it, you will short-circuit this process. If you are in a CG, what if you went to CG this week

with one simple thought... who can I build up? Who can I text or talk to? Who can I give a brick of encouragement? a brick of hope? A brick of prayer?

- And Paul says, the Thessalonians were doing this! And I see this in some spaces across CoaH but we need to grow in this. We are in tenuous times and eternity matters. The people around you matter. We need to be alert and sober-minded so we can serve our brothers and sisters in Christ and share the good news of Jesus with those who are in darkness apart from him.

CONCLUSION

- ILL – as many of you know, Suny Liaw, one of our lay elders and I went to Turkey to meet with some Christians there. The country is 99.9% Muslim but the church there is a powerful testimony to Jesus. We were blown away by Turkish Christians. The lay people we met were so serious about their faith and sharing their faith with their neighbors, their family, and even strangers they met on the street. They had such joy and truly celebrated the fruit in each others' churches and ministries. They're alert & awake, living ready for the Day of the Lord.
- How many of us would admit that we have been sleepwalking a bit recently?.... I think God has been waking me up... I have shared a bit but I had moved into a season of autopilot. There wasn't anything terrible happening but I was just a bit numb to the things of God. And I have talked with a number of you that God seems to be stirring. Nothing terrible was happening and I didn't realize it until God began to stir my heart.
- You might be in that spot. Sometimes it is just a response to a period of intense stress, exhaustion, or disappointment. You kind of go "numb" inside for a while. Or maybe you are kind of bored of your faith. And as New York pastor Jon Tyson likes to say, "If you are bored of your faith, I promise that God is also bored of your faith."
- But you don't have to stay there!
- Eph 5:14 "Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you."
- Jesus is inviting you in. You can tell Jesus today, "I'm ready. I want you to stir my heart afresh and anew. Would you awaken me?"
- For some of you maybe for the first time you are sensing something stirring in you. Some of you are awakening to who Jesus is, what he has done for you, and you want to live for him! You are seeing that the promises of success, achievement, and pleasure are ultimately not enough to fill the void in your soul. You are being invited by Jesus to step out of darkness into the light of life with him.
- INVITATION

PRAYER TEAM.... In the back corner and by the window. They have no greater joy than to pray for God to move in your heart, bring healing in your body, or to move in circumstances around you.

- COMMUNION** – go and take communion with a brother or sister in Christ. Build someone else up today by celebrating the body and blood of Jesus broken and poured out for you. Maybe you just embrace each other. Maybe you take time to pray together.

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