November 7 & 8, 2026 – Pentecost 24

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Concerning the times and dates, brothers, there is no need to write to you, for you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When people are saying, "Peace and security," destruction will suddenly come on them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will certainly not escape. But you, brothers, are not in the dark so that this day takes you by surprise like a thief, for you are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness. So then let us not sleep like everyone else, but rather let us remain alert and sober. To be sure, those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. You see, God did not appoint us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as you are also doing.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus waiting for Christ's Second Coming:

Now I don't know about you but sometimes "different" makes me nervous. Small, little things that suddenly become different aren't too bad but bigger things are. And maybe you feel the same way. For instance, for years your work schedule or task has been the same. But then they change it and you are going in to work at a different time or in a different area. It feels weird for a while, unsettling. We all have to admit that there is no worse feeling than feeling like you are out of control of what's going on around you. Call me a stubborn old German but I like consistency. And that is why the whole concept and idea of Judgment Day might be scary for us and make us feel uncomfortable.

How do you feel about Judgment Day? Well, if you are an extrovert, you may have the attitude, "Yea! Bring it on!" However, most of us are probably a little apprehensive. And that is because we have no idea when it will come and we really don't know the details of how it will work. Our human nature makes us scared of the unexpected. It's like waiting for the results of an important medical test. And while you are waiting it's really hard to concentrate on anything else. When it comes to Judgment Day, we all know that there will be a wait. How long a wait? We really don't know. But the fact is, **Judgment Day Is Coming: Let's Be Ready, Different and Confident.**

The Apostle Paul, who wrote this letter to the Christians living in Thessalonica, was aware that his audience already knew certain things about Christ's return. They knew that Christ's return would come unexpectedly, comparing it to a thief in the night. They also knew that some would not be ready. Today there are many people in our world who want to believe that there will be no Judgment Day. In other words, there is no need to be ready. There is no need to prepare. In their minds, God will not judge because he is a God of love. And because of that, he won't do anything bad to the people of the earth. But, even though that is what some people may WANT to believe, it's not what God says about himself in his Word. Yes, God is a God of love and he wants all people to be saved. But he also is a jealous God punishing the children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate him. God hates sin and, because of our sins, we deserve eternal punishment. But Jesus took the punishment for those sins away by dying on the cross and it is only by believing in him that we will get to heaven. That's basic Christianity. It's a truth so simple that little kids can understand it.

And yet, to some, it seems a lot more complicated. It's important to know that when Paul speaks of people being ready, he is talking about what God's love has already done. He has caused the light of his love to shine on us. He has drawn us into that light. We see what is coming. More than that we know who is coming. Our text encourages us by saying, **"But you, brothers, are not in the dark so that this day takes you by surprise like a thief, for you are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness."** As Christians we know that the day is coming. And we know that we can be ready only in that light of God's love.

Our text today also encourages us to be different. Not different in the sense of rebellious. Not different in the fact that we feel we have to act out in a way contrary to reality to try to draw attention to ourselves. No, different here is setting our plans and priorities on our future home of heaven, not on our temporary home here on earth. And in that way, Christians move and act differently than those who are, as our text says, in the dark.

Our text encourages us, **"So then let us not sleep like everyone else, but rather let us remain alert and sober. To be sure, those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night."** The **'everyone else'** Paul is talking about here were those people in Thessalonica who were persecuting Paul and the Christians there.

You see, Paul had been forced to leave the city of Thessolonica in hurry because some Jews had followed him there and were causing trouble. He wasn't able to stay long enough to establish a strong church there. This group of believers in the city of Thessalonica were only recent converts, people who used to be pagans and were still very weak in their faith. Add to that, they were being persecuted and you have a bit of a problem. So, Paul's sole purpose for writing this letter was to encourage them to remain true to Christ and to the gospel despite their persecution. He's saying, "Don't go back to the way you used to be. Be different, be Christians." And then he uses the illustration of spiritual sleep and spiritual drunkenness. When one is asleep, one is really not aware of what is going on around. You could say the same about one who is drunk. We have been called into the light. We have been called to move and act differently. Since we belong to the day God wants us to be self-controlled and alert, putting faith and love on as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. Christ gives us faith to replace fear, love to replace selfishness, and hope to replace despair.

And that then leads us to be confident. God has given us what we need. He has given us Christ. And that is all that we need when we face God on Judgment Day. So, we don't need to fear the unexpected. We don't have to be scared that at any moment Christ could return to this earth. While we're driving to work, while we're riding on the bus on the way to school, or while we are doing chores, it could happen at any time. And, even though that may make us a bit anxious and cause us some anxiety, our text tells us, **"You see, God did not appoint us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him."**

The story is told of a group of pioneers making their way across the great plains, headed to a distant place that had been opened up for homesteading. They traveled in covered wagons drawn by oxen so the progress was pretty slow. One day they were horrified to see a long line of smoke in the west, stretching for miles across the prairie. Soon it was evident that the dried grass was burning fiercely and coming toward them rapidly. They had crossed a river the day before, but it would be impossible to go back to that before the flames would get to them. One man knew what to do. He gave the command to set fire to the grass behind them. Then, when that space was burned over, the whole company moved into that space. As the flames roared on toward them from the west, a little girl cried out in fear, "Are you sure we won't all be burned up?" The man replied, "My child, the flames cannot reach us here, for we are standing where the fire has been." What a great picture of the believer who is safe in Christ. So take your stand and hold your ground with him. Christ has already been here. He has taken away all your sins as he suffered the fires of hell on the cross for you. You stand in his forgiveness, covered with his perfection. So now when you stand in him you don't need to fear the flames of the world that surround us.

Did you know that the phrase "do not be afraid" is written in the Bible 365 times? That's as many days as there are in a year. What a great reminder this is, that each day we have God with us to help us, to support us, to give us the strength we need. We don't need to fear the unexpected and those things which we don't fully understand. We can have confidence when it comes to Judgment Day because, for us, it will be the happiest day of our lives. That day is coming! So, we can say with confidence, "Bring it on!" Amen.