

Sermon for November 9, 2014 – Final Judgment

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11(NIV84)

Theme: The Day Is Surely Drawing Near

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ² for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵ You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶ So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹ For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

What a time we live in! Just think of all the opportunities we have for entertainment: Smart phones and tablets allow us to watch movies and play games when and wherever we want. Our T.V's are bigger and sharper than ever before. Fashionable clothing is becoming more accessible to the average consumer. Cars are coming with more luxuries as standard features – even going so far as to have wifi in them! There is so much “technology and stuff” in the world today, that it can easily make your head spin. What a time we live in!

We can certainly thank God for the many earthly blessings he allows us to enjoy, but be careful not to become engrossed in them. Why not? Because they are like an addictive drug – numbing us to the reality of our spiritual condition: that we need a Savior from sin.

Just as a person might dangle a carrot in front of a donkey to lead it where he wants it to go, so also the devil dangles the things of this world in front of our eyes to lead us where he wants us to go – and that is away from God. The devil persuades us to become engrossed with the pleasures of life – leading us to ask: “If life is so good, why do I need a savior? I have all that I need and want right here.” And so people become intoxicated with the things of this world.

But God's Word says: ¹⁵ *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.* (1Jo 2:15-17 NIV84)

Every day that passes, brings us a day closer to Christ's reappearing when He will destroy this wicked world and create a new heaven and new earth for his dearly loved believers. With St. Paul as our guide, let us learn to always be prepared for His coming under the theme: **The day is surely drawing near.** 1) *It will come like a thief.* 2) *So let us be vigilant and watch.*

Part One: It will come like a thief

Right before our sermon text, Paul gives a wonderful description of the resurrection of the dead that will happen when Christ returns. This Scriptural promise is so wonderfully comforting, that it may lead us to

ask: when, exactly, will this happen?

St. Paul answers this question by saying: *Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ² for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.*

It is foolish to try to determine exactly when Jesus is coming. Jesus himself said: *"It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.* (Act 1:7 NIV84)

Now, just because we can't determine when Jesus is coming, don't be fooled into thinking that he isn't going to come. Jesus promised that he is coming and has even told us about the signs preceding it like earthquakes, famines, floods, wars, persecution, an increase of lovelessness, the rise of false teachers, a great falling away from the faith, and the worldwide spread of the Gospel. All these signs are being fulfilled in ever increasing measure.

The world, however, doesn't see it. This too is a sign of the end. Paul writes: ³ *While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.*

Just take a cursory look over the last 10 years and count all the major natural disasters that have occurred like the Tsunami in South Eastern Asia, Hurricane Katrina, the earthquake in Haiti, and the Tsunami in Japan - just to name a few. To the Christian it is clear – the signs are all pointing to the end, especially when one considers the worldwide spread of the Gospel and the apostasy that is happening inside the visible Church with unnatural sins being called acceptable and god-pleasing.

The signs are clear, but instead of acknowledging them, the world cries out, "Peace and safety – all is well." Scientist tell us that there is no increase of major earthquakes, but that they are, just by chance, hitting more populated areas. Unbelieving scientists tell us that global warming is causing most of the problems we face in the world and that we should be more concerned about that, then some ancient book of fairytales.

"Peace and safety" is the mantra of this world, but God says, "Watch out. I am coming soon, and when I come you will not be able to stop it any more than a pregnant woman can stop her labor. Deny it all you want, but your destruction is near. And when I come, it will happen so suddenly that you won't even have the time to be shocked – let alone to try to quickly repent of your sin."

"But you, brothers," Paul writes, *"are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. We are not ignorant of what Gods word says. We know the signs and are called to be prepared. And why? Because we are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.*

What does Paul mean when he calls us "sons of the light?" He means that we are believers whom Jesus, the light of the world, has enlightened through His Word and sacraments to realize the seriousness of our sinfulness, repent, and trust in Jesus for forgiveness and eternal life, as Jesus once said: ¹⁶ *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. . . ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God (John 3:16, 19-21 NIV84)."*

Part Two: So let us be vigilant and watch.

St. Paul continues: ⁶ *So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.* ⁷ *For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.*

Just as the darkness of night tends to lull a person to sleep, so also the spiritual darkness of this world tries to lull us into spiritual slumber. How easy it is for us to find an excuse not to have devotions at home. How easy it is for us to find an excuse not to come to Bible class or worship. Just as a person deprived of sunlight easily becomes sleepy and depressed, so do we when we deprive ourselves of the SON-light of the Gospel. And just as a person who is used to the dark finds it incredibly hard to go back into the light, so also do those living in spiritual darkness find it hard to get back into the light of the Gospel.

The other danger that exists is the intoxicating wine of pleasure that the world offers us. It is so easy to get caught up in the cares of this world. Materialism is like a drug. When we buy something new, we are on top of the world. But then the newness wears off. We want to feel good again, so we buy something else. Like drug addicts we Americans buy and buy because we are not satisfied with what we have. We make our lives about living comfortably, looking for pleasure, and earthly happiness. It is so easy to become addicted to the things of this world and, in the process, forget about Christ, his Church, and the reason why we are on this earth.

This is why Paul says: *But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.*

Does a soldier on sentry duty get drunk? No, he stands armed, awake and ready – knowing that at any moment an attack can happen. So we too, knowing that Christ's return is imminent, are encouraged to stand sober and ready – clothed with the spiritual armor God grants us.

And what is this armor? First of all it is the breastplate of faith, which exhibits itself in love. What is faith other than confidence in Christ and his work of saving us? And since we are certain of our salvation, we naturally start to live our lives differently: no longer selfishly, but all to God's glory. Our faith moves us to live a life of love towards God and our fellow man.

The breastplate of faith and love protects our heart; and the hope of Christ's salvation, protects our head. The eager expectation of Christ's return keeps us from pursuing the things of this earth. We know that our time here is temporary, but what comes after Christ's return will be eternal.

Faith, hope and love in Christ – these virtues are the spiritual armor God wants us to clothe ourselves with as we watch for his return.

⁹ *For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.* ¹⁰ *He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.*

Jesus is not only our Judge, He is also our Savior. Make no mistake about it: God does not take pleasure in the death of anyone, but wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. It's for this reason that he sent his Son to suffer and die for the sins of the world. But the truth is that only those who receive this message in faith will be saved on the last day.

Rejoice in the fact that Jesus died for you - thereby paying for all your sins in full. Rejoice in the fact that even before the creation of the world God chose you to be his dearly loved child and sent His Spirit together with His Gospel to call you to faith so that you might live with him forever in paradise. Let these truths move you to keep your eyes on the skies and expectantly looking forward to Christ's return.

Christ's return has a lot of names that sometimes make us scared of it: Judgment Day, Doom's Day, The End, etc. . . . But remember this: Christ's coming is not only a day of Judgment, it is also the day of our deliverance. It is the day of our salvation.

The Germans have an interesting name for Judgment day: they call it "Der Juengste Tag" – the youngest day. Why do they call it that? Because Christians know that this day will be the first day of eternal life in our new glorified bodies with the LORD in paradise.

In view of this truth let us *encourage one another* with this Gospel and keep ourselves free from the love of this world. Why? Because **the day of Christ's return is surely drawing near.** *That day will come like a thief, so let us be vigilant and watch.* Amen.