

## 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 – “The Day of the Lord”

(Pew Bible Page: 987-988)

**Intro:** History is going somewhere. History is not an endless cycle of repeating successes and failures that finally take us back to where we began, primed for another beginning. No. History is moving inexorably toward a definite conclusion, a summing up of the story that brings everything to its proper conclusion, and Christianity tells us that the story of humanity will reach its finale when Jesus Christ returns. Jesus is coming again. The Day of the Lord will arrive, and we are given to understand that it could today. The Apostle Paul, writing to a congregation of new believers gave them and us needed instruction about this subject which we’ll explore together through these eleven verses.

**Proposition:** Jesus is coming again, so it is of highest importance that we be ready for His return.

Billboard:	(vv.1-2)	The Day
	(vv.3-5)	The People
	(vv.6-8)	The Differences
	(vv.9-11)	The Destinies

(vv.1-2) The Day – The Thessalonians were confused about the details of the Lord’s return. In 4:13-18 their confusion arose from an unexpected development. Their expectation was that Jesus’ return was immanent and would happen in their lifetime. But when some believers in Thessalonica passed away, and the Lord still had not come they were thrown into turmoil. This was unexpected and unsettling to them. What happened to their friends? Did this mean that their friends would not be saved when Jesus returned to gather His Saints? Paul answered their question by assuring them that when Jesus returned, their friends would return with Him to share the glories of the Kingdom. The verses we have before us today (vv.1-11) are a continued discussion of these things and of the events surrounding Christ’s return. In 4:13-18 the question being answered was, “What about those who have died?” In 5:1-11 Paul answers the question, “Granted that Jesus is coming again, how can we be ready for His coming?”

**1 Thessalonians 5:1–2** - *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 first question most people want to know concerns the time of Christ’s return. When is Jesus coming again? Are their signs which precede His return? Jesus’ disciples were curious about this too, as Matthew 24:3 tells us: **Matthew 24:3 - 3** *As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”* Christ gave some instructions on that, but that study properly belongs to the study Pastor Todd will take us through when we come to 2 Thessalonians. Today, we’ll simply confine ourselves to the answer Paul gave the Thessalonians here in chapter 5. He said, “You’ve already been taught that the coming of that Day will be sudden and unexpected by many, so I really don’t need to say anything more about that.”

Paul had previously taught them, “that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” – unexpectedly, suddenly in other words. The Thessalonians knew Jesus was coming again; knew that no one knows “*the times and the seasons*,” and were anticipating that Christ’s return could occur in their lifetime. We are just like the Thessalonians in this matter. We have been taught these same truths and have believe them. In fact, every generation of Christians since Christ’s

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ascension has expected His return in their lifetime, and that is a right thing. Jesus told us, “*Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.*” The teaching is that Christ’s return is always immanent. We are to live in expectation, saying to each other, “Perhaps today.”

That is one fact, but there is a second fact that also must be accounted for: Every generation of Christians for two-thousand years has expected the Lord to return in their lifetime. Every generation has been wrong. Every generation has seen convincing signs that Christ’s return was near and that they would be the last generation, but to this day no one has accurately predicted the return of the Lord. This is to be expected also. When the disciples asked the question of the Lord one last time, before His ascension, Jesus told them frankly, “*It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority*” (cf. Acts 2:7). We want to know the answer; but we are frankly told that the answer will NOT be forthcoming. Those who pretend that it is discernable are just blowing smoke. So, Paul said to the Thessalonians, and I say to you, “I really don’t need to say anything more about that.”

But we are not in the dark. The Bible tells us three things with certainty about this matter: Jesus is coming again; Jesus might come today; You can’t possibly figure out if He’s coming today or tomorrow.

The question, then, for the Thessalonians and for us is, “How are we to think about the return of the Lord?” What should we keep in mind as we await the return of our Savior? Theologian, Wayne Grudem, gives us a helpful perspective. He suggests that we say to ourselves that *it is possible that Jesus may come today, but it’s more likely that He’ll come tomorrow rather than today.* That’s a brilliant way to think of it because it encourages us to be prepared for His return today, without abandoning our responsibilities toward the future. And of course, that’s the tension: If we really think Jesus is coming today, we may forget to do the things He’s told us to do tomorrow.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Jesus may come today, but we can’t be certain of that. So, we must live in readiness for His return today and in readiness for whatever comes tomorrow. Paul now goes on to teach us what that means.

(vv.3-5) The People – We are told that there are two kinds of people awaiting the Lord’s return – Those who are unprepared, and those who are prepared. **1 Thessalonians 5:3–5 - 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.*

The difference between these two groups is compared to the difference between “light” and “darkness.” Those who are in darkness are spiritually ignorant – they do not receive God’s Word, nor do they wish to. When Jesus comes, we are told, they will be completely “caught out.” These people will be like the generation alive at the time of Noah. Jesus described them this way: **Matthew 24:38–39 - 38**

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*For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, **39** and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.* Those who are unprepared are preoccupied with the normal concerns of life and have no concern for any supposed return of the Savior. But like the flood of Noah’s day, the return of Jesus will be sudden and devastating for the unprepared.

In contrast to this group will be those who are prepared, called here, “brothers.” This is the community of believers – Christ followers – who will not be surprised at all by His return, because we are of the light. We have heard and heeded Christ’s warning to be ready. We have received the Light of His Word and are anticipating and preparing for His return.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] The way to be prepared for His coming is to receive and believe the light He has given.

(vv.6-8) The Differences – So, there are these two groups of people awaiting the return of Jesus. Paul now gives us the distinguishing marks of each kind of person, the unprepared and the prepared. **1 Thessalonians 5:6–8** - **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.* Those who are unprepared and living in darkness “sleep,” we are told. They are spiritually insensitive. They have no interest in spiritual things. Their consciences are not troubled by senseless behaviors, pictured here through drunkenness. These are those who love the darkness. Jesus spoke of them in **John 3:19–20** - **19** *And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.*

On the other hand, there are those who are prepared and have dressed themselves for spiritual warfare: **1 Thessalonians 5:8** - **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.* These believers are pictured as having dressed themselves in the armor of God, the three great gifts of the Spirit to those who believe: Faith, Love and Hope. Moreover, they are described as “sober” – clear minded, right thinking about God and man. These are the marks that identify an individual as being someone who belongs to Christ and is prepared for His return.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] The prepared may be distinguished from those not prepared through observable behavior and attitude differences. Jesus said, “*You will recognize them by their fruits*” (cf. Matt. 7:16). The lives people are living today reveal whether they are prepared for the Lord’s return tomorrow.

(vv.9-11) The Destinies – There are two destinies – one for the unprepared and one for the redeemed. **1 Thessalonians 5:9–11** - **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.*

In these verses Paul contrasts the destinies of the prepared and the unprepared. Those who are unprepared are destined for “wrath” – perdition, eternal separation from God. Revelation 21:8 speaks of these people: **Revelation 21:8** - **8** *But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for*

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*murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”* The unprepared will experience the wrath of God.

But the destiny of the redeemed is different. Those who are prepared for the return of Christ will enjoy eternal fellowship with God as Matthew 25:34 tells us: **Matthew 25:34 - 34** *Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

How do the redeemed enter this bliss? *“Through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him”* (vv.9b-10). This closes Paul’s discussion of the question begun in 4:13, concerning believers who are alive at the Lord’s return and those who have passed away before His return. More important than that, this verse shows us the essential requirement for being among the prepared: We must be born again. No one is prepared who has not entered a vital relationship with Jesus, for His sacrifice is all important if we are to be prepared for His return.

Having finished his teaching, Paul made his application to the Thessalonians in verse 11: **1 Thessalonians 5:11 - 11** *Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.* These teachings are meant for our encouragement.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] There are two distinct destinies awaiting those prepared for Christ’s return and those who are unprepared for His coming. Those who are believers, those living in the light, should find encouragement in this truth. Those unprepared, living in darkness, should take warning. Jesus is coming again, so it is of highest importance that we be ready for His return.

**Conclusion:** The key point of this lesson is this: Jesus is coming again, so it is of highest importance that we be ready for His return. In the light of this it is appropriate for us to close our service with a few searching questions. Are you living in the light or are you still in darkness? Is the way you are living your life consistent with what you profess to believe? Are you prepared to face Christ when He returns, knowing as you do now that there are different destinies awaiting those who are prepared and the unprepared? Those who are prepared for the coming of the Lord should be encouraged by the things we have studied today. Are you one of them? It is possible, that Jesus may come today.