

The Books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians

Lesson 7: The Day of the Lord: Awake and Sober -- 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

No one schedules a burglary on their calendar. That is precisely what makes a thief so dangerous; he comes when you are not watching, on an ordinary night when nothing seems wrong. Paul reaches for exactly this image to describe the day of the Lord. It will come, he says, “like a thief in the night.” He has just finished comforting the Thessalonians about believers who have died and the certainty of Christ’s return. Now he turns to a natural follow-up question: when? And his answer is bracing. Stop asking when. You already know what you need to know. The day is certain, and the timing is hidden, so the only sane response is to stay ready.

Paul draws a sharp line between two ways of living. There are people who say “peace and security,” who have settled comfortably into life as though this world were all there is and judgment were a myth. For them, Paul says, destruction will come suddenly, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, unavoidable and impossible to outrun. But then he turns to the believers with a different word entirely: “But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.” The day need not ambush God’s people, because God’s people belong to the day. We are children of light.

So how do children of light live? Paul uses the language of being awake and sober while others sleep and get drunk. He is not mainly talking about bedtimes and beverages; he is talking about spiritual alertness. The world is spiritually asleep, numbed by distraction and dulled by indulgence, drifting through life with no thought of the One who is coming. Christians are called to live wide awake, clear-headed, watchful, dressed for action in the armor of faith, love, and hope. We are not anxious, but we are alert. We are not frantic, but we are ready.

Underneath the call to readiness lies one of the most comforting assurances in the letter. Paul says God has not destined His people for wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, alive or already in the grave when He comes, we will live with Him. The same truth that calls us to vigilance also steadies us with hope. So this lesson asks the searching question behind every honest heart: if the Lord came tonight, like a thief, would He find you awake? And it answers with the deeper good news of a Savior who died to make us His own. Then it sends us out to do what Paul commands: encourage one another and build one another up.

Group Discussion: Paul says the day of the Lord will come “like a thief in the night,” while many are saying “peace and security.” What are the ways people today lull themselves into ignoring the reality that they will one day stand before God, and how does the church stay awake without becoming anxious or obsessed with predicting dates?

Personal Reflection: Paul calls believers to stay awake and sober rather than spiritually asleep like the world around them. In what area of your life are you most prone to spiritual drowsiness or numbness right now, and what would waking up look like there?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

Study Questions

1. Paul writes that “the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night,” arriving suddenly when people say “peace and security” (vv. 2–3). What does this teach about the certainty and the hidden timing of that day, and why does it make date-setting and prediction miss Paul’s whole point?
2. Where are you tempted to settle into a comfortable “peace and security,” living as though this world is all there is? What would it look like to live with the reality of the Lord’s coming honestly in view?
3. Paul tells the believers, “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” (vv. 4–5). What does this teach about the believer’s identity, and why need that day not catch God’s people off guard?
4. What does it mean for you, practically, to live as a “child of light” in your home, your workplace, and your private moments? Where does that identity most need to shape your behavior?
5. Paul urges believers to “keep awake and be sober,” putting on “the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation” (vv. 6–8). What do spiritual alertness and sobriety look like, and how do faith, love, and hope actually protect us?
6. Which piece of the armor, faith, love, or hope, feels weakest in you right now, and how might its weakness be leaving you spiritually exposed? What would strengthening it look like?
7. Paul says, “For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 9). What does this teach about God’s gracious purpose for His people and about the true basis of a believer’s assurance?
8. How does the assurance that God has appointed His people for salvation, not wrath, give you confidence without making you careless? How do you hold genuine assurance and genuine watchfulness together?
9. Paul says Christ “died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him” (v. 10). What does this verse teach about what Christ’s death secures for us, and how does it fuel both our readiness now and our comfort in the face of death?
10. Paul ends, “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up” (v. 11). Name one specific way you sense Jesus calling you to wake up spiritually, to rest in His finished work, or to build up another believer, and what your first step will be.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 24:42-44, watching because we do not know the day our Lord is coming; Luke 12:35-40, keeping our lamps burning, ready like servants awaiting their master; Romans 13:11-14, casting off the works of darkness and putting on the armor of light; Ephesians 6:13-17, the full armor of God for the believer's stand; 2 Peter 3:10-14, the day of the Lord coming like a thief and the call to holy and godly lives.