



1 THESSALONIANS 5

A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

In this chapter Paul reminds us that Christ's return will come "like a thief in the night." We can't know the day or hour, but we can be prepared. If Jesus returns today, what will He find you doing? Where will He find you? "Let us not be like others, who are asleep." We should "belong to the day" so that we can meet Jesus with anticipation. -JT

1 Now, brothers and sisters, 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 and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all children of the light and children 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 awake and sober. 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 sober, 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.

12 Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. 14 And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not treat prophecies with contempt 21 but test them all; hold on to what is good, 22 reject every kind of evil.

23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

25 Brothers and sisters, pray for us. 26 Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. 27 I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.

28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

STUDY NOTES BlueLetterBible.org Commentary

Concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you: The Thessalonians were well taught about the return of Jesus and other prophetic matters. Paul taught them about the times and the seasons regarding the return of Jesus. They had an idea of the prophetic times they lived in, and they could discern the seasons of the present culture.

Again, we are impressed that Paul was with the Thessalonians only for a few weeks (Acts 17:2). In that time, he taught them about the prophetic times and seasons regarding the return of Jesus. Paul would be surprised that some people today consider the return of Jesus an unimportant teaching.

The day of the Lord so comes: With this phrase, Paul quoted a familiar Old Testament idea. The idea behind the phrase the day of the Lord is that this is God's time. Man has his "day," and the Lord has His day. In the ultimate sense, the day of the Lord is fulfilled with Jesus judging the earth and returning in glory.

It does not refer to a single day, but to a season when God rapidly advances His agenda to the end of the age. The day of the Lord "Is a familiar Old Testament expression. It denotes the day when God intervenes in history to judge His enemies, deliver His people, and establish His kingdom." (Hiebert)

For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night: The Thessalonians knew, and had been taught, that they couldn't know the day of Jesus' return. That day would remain unknown, and come as a surprise, as a thief in the night. A thief does not announce the exact time of his arrival.

Paul certainly was not one to set dates in regard to prophecy, and Jesus forbade setting dates when He said of that day and hour no one knows (Matthew 24:36). God wants this day to be unexpected, but He wants His people to be prepared for the unexpected.

For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them: The unexpected nature of that day will be a tragedy for the unbeliever. They will be lulled to sleep by political and economic conditions, but they will be rudely awakened. They will hear the frightening verdict "they shall not escape."

When "all's well" and "all is safe" are on the lips of men. (Moffatt)

As labor pains upon a pregnant woman: The phrase labor pains suggest both inevitability and unexpectedness. Jesus used the same idea in Matthew 24:8, when He spoke of calamities preceding the end times as the beginning of sorrows, which is literally the beginning of labor pains. The idea is both of giving birth to a new age and implying an increase of intensity and frequency in these calamities. "1. Certainly; 2. Suddenly; 3. Irresistibly, inevitably." (Trapp)

But you, brethren, are not in darkness: In addressing their behavior, Paul first simply told the Thessalonian Christians that they should be who they are. God has made us sons of the light and sons of the day. The time when we were of the night or of the darkness is in the past. So now we simply have to live up to what God has made us.

“Paul is led from a consideration of the day of the Lord to the thought that the Thessalonians have nothing to fear from the coming of that Day. This leads to the further thought that their lives should be in harmony with all that that day stands for.” (Morris)

In some respect, the coming of Jesus will be a surprise for everybody, because no one knows the day or the hour (Matthew 24:36). But for Christians who know the times and the seasons, it will not be a complete surprise. No one knows the exact hour a thief will come, but some live in a general preparation against thieves. Those who **are not in darkness**, who live as they **are all sons of light and sons of the day**, these are ready for the return of Jesus.

But if we are **in darkness** — perhaps caught up in some of the sin Paul warned against previously in this letter — then we are not ready and need to make ourselves ready for the return of Jesus.

Therefore let us not sleep: Because we do not belong to the night nor of darkness (1 Thessalonians 5:5), our spiritual condition should never be marked by **sleep**. Spiritually speaking, we need to be active and aware, to **watch and be sober**.

Not sleep: Paul used a different word here than for the sleep of death mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4:13. “The word sleep is here used metaphorically to denote indifference to spiritual realities on the part of believers. It is a different word than that in 4:13-15 for the sleep of death. It covers all sorts of moral and spiritual laxity or insensibility.” (Hiebert)

Sleep speaks of so much that belongs to the world (the others), but should not belong to Christians:

- Sleep speaks of ignorance.
- Sleep speaks of insensibility.
- Sleep speaks of no defense.
- Sleep speaks of inactivity.

**PRAYER IS COMMUNICATION WITH GOD,
AND WE CAN LIVE EACH MINUTE OF
THE DAY IN A CONSTANT, FLOWING,
CONVERSATION WITH GOD.**

In a sermon on this text titled, “Awake! Awake!” Spurgeon showed the folly and tragedy of the sleeping Christian with three powerful pictures:

- A city suffers under the plague, with an official walking the streets crying out, “Bring out the dead! Bring out the dead!” All the while, a doctor with the cure in his pocket sleeps.
- A passenger ship reels under a storm and is about to crash on the rocks, bringing near-certain death to the hundreds of passengers — all the while, the captain sleeps.
- A prisoner in his cell is about ready to be led to execution; his heart is terrified at the thought of hanging from his neck, terrified of death, and of what awaits him after death. All the while, a man with a letter of pardon for the condemned man sits in another room — and sleeps.

Sober doesn't mean humorless. It has in mind someone who knows the proper value of things, and therefore doesn't get too excited about the things of this world. The person who lives his or her life for fun and entertainment isn't **sober**.

Rejoice always: Not only rejoicing in happy things, but in sorrows also. The Christian can rejoice always because their joy isn't based in circumstances, but in God. Circumstances change, but God doesn't.

Pray without ceasing: Christians are to pray continually. We can't bow our heads, close our eyes, and fold our hands without ceasing, but those are customs of prayer, not prayer itself. Prayer is communication with God, and we can live each minute of the day in a constant, flowing, conversation with God.

In everything give thanks: We don't give thanks for everything, but in everything. We recognize God's sovereign hand is in charge, and not blind fate or chance. “When joy and prayer are married their first born child is gratitude.” (Spurgeon)

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1 THESSALONIANS 5

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**REJOICE ALWAYS
PRAY CONTINUALLY
GIVE THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES**



**FOR THIS IS GOD'S WILL FOR YOU
IN CHRIST JESUS**

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18