

The Day of the Lord, Part I

Call to Worship: Psalm 95

1st Scripture: 2 Peter 3

2nd Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

Hymn #727- *When the Roll is Called Up Yonder*

Hymn Insert- *Before the Throne of God Above*

Hymn #580- *When Peace Like a River*

Introduction:

"Now when He (Jesus) was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." Then He said to the disciples, "The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, 'Look here!' or 'Look there!' Do not go after them or follow them. For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day. But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. "In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left." And they answered and said to Him, "Where, Lord?" So He said to them, "Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together" (Luke 17:20-37).

Our Lord spoke most of these words to his disciples, having been provoked by the Pharisees, who (more than likely, with improper motives) asked Him when the kingdom of God would come. And, upon correcting their misunderstanding of the kingdom of God, which begins in the heart, as a spiritual kingdom, produced by the Holy Spirit in all whom He regenerates, indwells and converts, and consummates at the return of Christ, He brought to the foreground that sobering theme of, "The Day of the Lord," which had been spoken about often, throughout the Old Covenant, by means of the prophets. Only here, Christ owned that Day as His own, calling it the Day belonging to the Son of Man (vs. 24). Yes, that dreadful and fearful and glorious and wondrous Day of the Lord, spoken of by the Old Covenant prophets, is here more clearly revealed as the Day of Christ's return. He is the One, who will come to the aid of His people, while pouring out His fiery wrath upon all who do not know Him.

Man has had many days, for the thousands of years he has lived on this earth. All kinds of accomplishments, feats, victories, battles, technological advancements, and a host of other things that we regurgitate in all of our history books. But, there is coming a *Day of the Lord*; a Day above all days that will never be forgotten; a Day, which will totally eclipse the glory of all of man's days put together in one ball, when God will say His piece and bring about the completion of His will, which has been unfolding all along, behind the curtain of the history of mankind. And that Day will be a Day of reckoning; a Day of recompense; a Day, when God will reveal Himself universally in the return of His Son, who will destroy this entire world and usher His people home to glory! In our first Scripture reading, we saw how Peter described this Day, and in our main text, we find Paul, here addressing that same great theme. In fact, that theme tends to dominate the driving force behind both of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians. Consider 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12, for another taste of Paul's description of that great Day.

And so, this morning then, we will consider one particular aspect of this theme (of the Day of the Lord), most specifically, the suddenness of its appearing, in accordance with Paul's exhortation, given here in our main text.

I. The Day of the Lord

Having just comforted the brethren (vs. 13-18), concerning the future gathering of all the saints (at Christ's return), Paul builds on that theme, by specifically addressing the coming of the Lord on that great Day. And his emphasis at this point, deals specifically with the "suddenness" of Christ's return: "But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night." In keeping with the teaching of our Lord and of the Apostle Peter as well, Paul speaks of the "Day of the Lord;" that is, the Day of Christ's return, as best illustrated by a thief coming in the night to rob someone's house. In other words, this is not to relate our Lord's intentions to the wicked intentions of a thief, but rather, it is to highlight the suddenness and unexpectedness of our Lord's coming, likened to that of a thief's coming into a victim's house. It is unexpected and sudden.

The home owner was living life as usual, when suddenly, without warning, a thief had come, entered his house and stolen some of his valuable possessions. And by the time the homeowner realizes it, it is too late. Everything is gone and he is utterly shocked and taken by surprise, by all that has transpired. This is the way our Lord's return will be experienced by the world; by those who do not know Him. Notice, Paul elaborates further on this in verse 3: "For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape." Again, Paul is addressing the element of suddenness and surprise here, but he also brings the "finality" of the matter into the equation as well, which certainly highlights the sobering and frightening experience attached to all unbelievers who are living when Christ returns.

The world continues to follow its course; people are getting married, graduations take place, vacations are enjoyed, people are working, everyone assumes a continued state of peace and safety (a continuation today of where yesterday left off). And then, instantly, "Wham!" The Lord returns, like labor pains that shoot upon a woman, completely outside of her control, and the world is absolutely shocked and caught off guard. And worst of all, there is no turning back! What's done is done! History is forever sealed! There is no repentance to be granted at those final moments, nowhere to run or hide! All they can do is face their certain and impending,

eternal doom! This is what Paul is emphasizing here. Suddenness, immediacy, surprise, an invasion and a breaking in, as it were, into the cycle of every day life, with the jaw dropping, finality of God's judgment upon all of mankind, who yet, remain outside of the safe haven; the ark of Jesus Christ! [Biblical illustrations: Noah's flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah] Such is the case for the unbelieving world.

But brethren, this ought not to be the case for the Church. Notice, what Paul states in verse 4: "But you, brethren (contrary to the world, but you...), are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. "Your condition is different than the condition of those who are yet lost and outside of Christ. You are not in darkness. You are not unregenerate and incapable of discerning spiritual things, so that this Day should overtake you (surprise you, invade your life cycle) like a thief.

Continuing on into verse 5, Paul adds, "You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness." The Christian has spiritual eyes and the ability to comprehend the truths which are revealed in Scripture. The Christian can be well prepared, having an understanding of that which is to come. Indeed, he anticipates it! Though he does not know the precise day, he anticipates, expects and prepares for, the coming of that great Day! His soul is convicted of the reality, which is given us in Scripture. The Holy Spirit enlivens such a conviction in the heart. He yearns, "Even so, come quickly Lord Jesus!" Unlike the world, which cannot comprehend the truth, even when it is directly told it; unlike the world, which walks in a fog of deception, denying the obvious (of all that is to come), the blinders have been torn off of the redeemed Christian. He is a child of light now, and he understands and sees, that which the devil has hidden from the world.

This being the case, Paul charges the Thessalonians in verse 6, "Therefore (this being the case) let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober." "Since we know, understand and are convinced of the truth, let us not, once again, get swept away in the deception of the world, living as if time will just carry on (business as usual). Let us watch; let us look forward, awaiting the return of the Bridegroom, with plenty of oil in our lamps, being sober; that is, self-controlled and not governed by the tide of our natural, fleshly desires. Let us live in a focused, ever conscious manner, buffeting our bodies when they seek to drift astray, so that we might not

get taken by surprise; so that, we are not caught in a drunken stupor when our glorious Lord returns, but rather, with outstretched arms, we can call out to Him, "O Lord, here I am! Come and take me home!"

Paul builds further on this charge, but we will wait until next time, Lord willing, to continue with this glorious theme.

II. Closing Thoughts and Applications

For now, brethren, let us conclude our time by considering a few, relevant, closing thoughts and applications:

1) The charge here for the church is to be ready for the Day of the Lord (for Christ's return) because, unlike the world, we ought not to be surprised or devastated when it happens. Again, we know the truth. The Holy Spirit has awakened us unto it. But, how are we to be ready? How are we to ensure that we are "awake" and not sleeping? How are we to watch and to be sober and self-controlled? Does this mean that we simply sit by our windows each day, and wait around, doing nothing until we see the Lord coming on the clouds? Of course not!

Not only do our Lord's parables of the Ten Virgins and of the Talents contradict such a notion, but Peter, who compliments Paul here very well, opens this up a bit more. Listen again to Peter's words from 2 Peter 3:10-13, which help define these terms for us. [Read 2 Peter 3:10-18 and also note his reference to Paul in verses 15&16]

You see, brethren, we wait for the Lord; we look forward to His coming; we are awake and self-controlled by striving on the path of holy conduct and godliness. We seek to be found by Christ in peace, without spot and blameless. In other words, we consciously acknowledge, anticipate and await His coming, by fixing our attention on Christ now, and living in accordance with His teachings and commands. We don't get swept away by the world and its hopes and its ideals and its dreams and its conduct and focus, which are all driven by the darkness that is in them; that same darkness that cannot comprehend what we see in the light, namely, that Christ will return and we must be ready.

You see, brethren, this entails a daily, conscious, focus on Christ and His kingdom. There is no coasting to heaven. There is no conveyor belt to glory! The Kingdom of heaven must be

taken by violence, by all who enter it! While we recognize that our justification is totally and completely based upon the work and merits of Christ, at the same time, we fight the good fight and lay hold of eternal life; we push forward; we persevere and endure and progress, seeking to glorify our beloved Savior, the whole way home. That is what is meant here by staying awake and remaining sober. We don't get swept back into the drunk stupor of the world, which presumes that tomorrow will most certainly be a "to be continued" of today. No, we daily, fix our eyes above, where Christ is, living presently as citizens of His kingdom, carrying that life before the face of God ("Corem Deo") down to earth, so that, we as sons of light, will bear that light in the surrounding darkness, with the hope that others might be saved by that very same light!

[My own daily experience of forgetfulness, and my fervent need to come up for air, every morning and evening, to be reminded of the truth, which I am so prone toward walking away from; in the Word, in prayer, and in every means of grace; prayer meeting...etc]

The critical words for this morning, brethren, are "conscious, focused, proactive, sober minded, self-controlled and in the battle"...daily!

2) Unbeliever, you are still in the dark, and you're in for a rude, rude, awakening. You are not ready for that Day! [Remember the flood and Sodom and Gomorrah! It will happen! They also denied it back then...etc]

May God shine the light of Christ on your darkness before it is too late!

Amen!!!

The Lord's Supper!