

“Ready or Not”

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

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All Scripture quoted from ESV unless otherwise noted

Home improvement projects always leave a lot of cleaning up to do. But you can't just leave it or someone will eventually step on it, or trip over it. It's even more hazardous in the dark. Even just walking through your house can be dangerous if there are toys like Lego® bricks or jacks laying around. Just imagine if someone put a brick somewhere on the floor between you bed and the bathroom at night. Wouldn't it be better to get rid of that brick, or at least turn on the light?

Think about classic game of hide and seek. One person counts and the others go to hide. When the counter is ready, they yell, “Ready or not, here I come” and they try to find those who are hiding. The counter will come when he/she is ready, whether you are ready or not, and if you're not ready, you'll be caught.

Maybe there are some parallels between that game and the real-life truth of Jesus' return. Some people like to make claims and argue about when it will happen, or say that we're almost there. I suggest you stick with Matthew 24:36, “**But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.**”

Rather than wondering about when and how Jesus will return, what if you just lived ready, no matter what happens? It seems to me that this is what Paul is suggesting for each of us this morning, drawing a comparison between Jesus' return and the onset of labor pains. When hard labor sets in, nothing else matters. Likewise, when Jesus does return nothing else will matter, apart from your relationship with Him. It won't matter how much of the Bible you've read or memorized, or whether you grew up in church, or whether you put enough money into the box in the back. All that matters is whether or not you know Jesus.

As we examine 1 Thessalonians 5, there are two things we should walk away with. The first thing is to be aware. That is, know what you know. On March 2, 1962, with 46 seconds left in a basketball game, Wilt Chamberlain scored his 100th point. Historical accuracies about that night are hard to come by. Many people, including Chamberlain, once thought the final :46 was never played, but audio recordings reveal that they were.

Eschatology (study of end times) has a lot of mystique and uncertainty about it. Many have made false claims or have erroneously believed things that are simply not made clear in God's Word. God's Word is our ultimate authority, and those end-times matters that are not clarified in the Bible cannot truly be known with absolute certainty.

The Bible says that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. *On that day, eternal destinies will be finalized. Like when God closed the door to the ark, the fate of all those who were on the outside was at that moment decided. Likewise, when the Lord returns, in an instant – in the twinkling of an eye – it will be too late to change your mind.*

The second thing we should walk away from 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 is to be prepared. The fact that so many will be unprepared for the Day of the Lord is the greatest of all tragedies. Logically, when you know trouble (such as a blizzard, hurricane, etc.) is coming, you make preparations. Or if your hero is coming to your house, you would prepare by cleaning up, getting some snacks, or whatever you would do to be ready for his/her arrival.

Jesus is coming back. We don't know when, but we are told to be watchful, to be ready. 1 Thess. 5 repeatedly contrasts light and dark; drunkenness and sobriety. Drunkenness doesn't typically occur after one drink. Slowly, the alcohol takes over and results in impairment of the senses and skewed judgment. So, it is with darkness – as the light of day slowly recedes, your senses are gradually diminished, exposing you to dangers that you may have easily avoided if you were walking in the light.

It is not befitting for children of the light to dwell in darkness. 2 Corinthians 6:14 says in part, "What partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?"

Child of the most high God, how have you chosen to walk in darkness? What do you need to do in order to be prepared for the Day of the Lord? What is in your life right now that you would not want Jesus to know about? Keeping those things in your life is a bit like putting a brick in your own path; like putting a hundred Lego blocks in your hallway and walking through it at night. Of course, you're going to stub your toe or get hurt somehow!

It's time for a clean sweep! It's time to live every day like it's your last one on earth! Time to clean out your spiritual house! Brothers and sisters, you are the temple of the Holy Spirit! Don't set up pagan idols in God's temple! You set up a pagan idol when you harbor a harmful attitude toward someone, when you put your own agenda ahead of God's agenda, when you eat a piece of candy or a grape in the grocery store without paying for it, when you look at a woman with lust in your heart, when you choose revenge and bitterness over forgiveness and healing; when you neglect your need for a Sabbath day of rest, when you disregard your parents, when you wish harm upon another person, and so on. It's time to sweep that stuff out – it doesn't belong in God's temple!

There is coming a day whose exact date is uncertain, though it may be very near for any one of us; it is the day your earthly life will be over. You may not live to see Jesus' return. Are you ready, right now, for your life to be over and to stand face to face with Jesus?

A story is told of Sir Ernest Shackleton, who on one of his expeditions to the Antarctic, left some of his men on Elephant Island, intending to return for them and take them back to England. Only after numerous delays was he finally able to go back, but by then the sea had frozen and prevented him three times from reaching them. But on his 4th attempt, he broke through and to his surprise, he found the crewmen waiting for him, supplies packed and ready to board. Aboard the ship back to England, he asked how they knew he would return that particular day. They told him they did not know when he would return, but they were sure that he would, so every morning, the group's leader rolled up his bag, and packed his gear and told the crew to do the same, saying, "Get your things ready, boys; the boss may come today."

Jesus is coming again. Are you ready? What do you need to do in order to be ready for that day? What bricks do you need to get rid of? What junk do you need to sweep out? What do you

need to confess and be done with, right here and right now? The time for preparation is now. May God reveal to you every obstacle in your way, and gently prod you to deal with them so that you may be prepared for His glorious coming.

Takeaways from this message.

Jesus will return **SUDDENLY** and **UNEXPECTEDLY**.

Two things you should walk away with from 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

- First – Be **AWARE**; know what you know
 - Eschatology (the study of end-times) has a lot of **MYSTIQUE** about it.
 - *On that day, eternal destinies will be **FINALIZED**.*
- Second – be **PREPARED**
 - The fact that so many will be unprepared for the Day of the Lord is the greatest of all **TRAGEDIES**.
 - Live in a constant state of **READINESS**.

The time for **PREPARATION** is now.

DIG IN!

Here are some farm-fresh questions that will help you to personalize and apply this morning's message.

1. **What end-times questions do you have? How can you find answers to these questions?**
2. **Why might God have decided that the last days would come on suddenly and unexpectedly, rather than giving a clear warning first?**
3. **What do you like to do on your day of rest? How does this honor God?**
4. **Count how many times Paul says the terms day, light, night, darkness. What do you suppose he was trying to convey by using these comparisons?**
5. **Compare Paul's brief summary of a Christian's armor in 1 Thess. 5 with the fuller description given in Eph. 6. Describe any similarities or differences.**
6. **No one looks forward to labor pains or to the coming of a thief. Why do you suppose these images are used to describe the coming of Christ?**
7. **What have you learned through your personal time of Bible reading this week?**