

How we think about “end times” and “the return of Jesus”, can say a lot about our relationship with God.

Some folk have zero interest in this. It might sound crazy, but when it comes to the return of Jesus, there are some Christians have an anticipation factor of close to zero... In other words, they love the experience of this world, and they love the things and relationships that we enjoy in this world, so much, that it becomes their focus, and they don't want it to come to an end...

But then there's others who are cranky at the world, and it's like they're looking for a bit of pay-back, and they're really looking forward to the Day of Judgment (“Get ‘em God”)...

You see, they crave the **justice** of God, but they do not seem to share the love that God has – the love that causes our Heavenly Father to delay the Day of Judgment, in the hope that more will repent and be saved...

And then there's the persecuted church. And they cry out, “How long???” In Revelation 6, we catch a glimpse of the Throne-Room of Heaven, and under the Altar are the souls of those who have been slain for the Word of God, and they cry out, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood....?”

And the Lord tells them, “A bit longer. Rest a little longer. More of your brothers will die for their faith yet....”

And so, for a Christian, “The return of Jesus”, is something we rightly crave. And as we consider the return of Jesus today, I

pray that God's word, will increase our faith/hope/love of Jesus, and our love for others... So, let's get into it.

Before I went away on holidays, we were in Chapter 4. And we learned that when Jesus returns, no one, is going to miss out. For those who are in Christ, those who have already died, will be raised back to life, and instantaneously, they will be bodily present, for the return of Jesus. And so, those who have died, along with those who are still alive, will be caught up together, to be with Jesus, at His coming.

Now, the natural question is, "When's that going to happen?".... Who knows? God the Father knows, and that's it.

The coming of "The Day of The Lord" is a sudden inevitability (It is going to happen), but we do not know when.

Those who are "in Christ", **know** that it is going to happen, and we are **ready** for it to happen, and we are expectantly waiting for Jesus to come,,,,, But for those who are not "in Christ", it will be a day that catches them completely unawares.

Now, something I've noticed, is for some folk, when they're thinking about the return of Jesus, they're on the look-out for a sign that Jesus is about to come. And ever since I was a boy (which to me, doesn't seem that long ago), I've heard Christians saying, "Oh, Jesus has got to come back soon. The

signs are there. Things are getting so bad...”... But you know what: now, as I read my Bible, I want to ask those people the question, “What particular signs are you talking about???”

Paul said to the Thessalonians, ^{5:1}Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. Why? Because they were well aware of what the signs were, right??? **Wrong**... It’s because they knew, that there is no special sign. The Day of The Lord, is a day that will appear **suddenly**; unexpectedly; like a thief in the night...

But hang on a minute, isn’t there going to be wars and rumours of wars, and that’s when Jesus comes???... No.... Jesus explicitly says, “That is not the sign”. “These things will happen”, He said, “**but the end is not yet**” (Matthew 24)....

What’s the sign? Everything is going to be rolling along, as per normal. So, if there’s **nothing** out of the ordinary, it is highly likely that Jesus is about to return. It’s ³ **While people are saying, “There is peace and security,”** , that’s when destruction comes... (Just like labour pains coming upon a pregnant woman).

It has a sudden inevitability about it. *When a woman is pregnant, she knows that she’s going to get the labour pains, but she doesn’t know when. The Day of Labour is inevitable. But without medical intervention, we don’t know **what** day it will be. That’s why at our hospital, we have the*

accommodation for expectant mothers to stay there, a week or so before their due date. We don't know what day the contractions are going to begin...

So, Jesus will return on a day when it is least expected. Many will have a feeling of confidence in their position of “peace and security”. But in an instant, it's all going to be upended...

Now, in the Bible, the return of Jesus is known by several terms:

- the “parousia” = “the coming”;
- the “apocalypse” = “the revealing”;
- the “epiphany” = “the appearing”;

and then there is:

- The Day of The Lord

And The Day of The Lord (which is the term that's used here), is a reminder, that when Jesus returns, He won't be coming as “gentle Jesus, meek & mild”. He comes as the righteous Judge....

And to get a better understanding of this, the language that Paul uses here, with images of light and darkness, reminds us of the Old Testament Prophet, Amos 5.

Let me tell you about Amos.

Amos was a prophet to God's chosen people of Israel. And up until Amos, their understanding of “The Day of The Lord”, was “That's the day God is going to judge everybody else”...

It's always comforting to have the perspective that "God's judgment is going to be upon those other people."... But Amos turned that perspective completely on its head.

At the time of Amos, God's own people (the people of Israel), were living in idolatry; and extravagance; and corruption. The rich and the powerful, oppressed the poor. And the Lord said:

Amos 5:18-24 (ESV)

¹⁸ Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD!

Why would you have the day of the LORD?

It is darkness, and not light,

¹⁹ as if a man fled from a lion,

and a bear met him,

or went into the house and leaned his hand against
the wall,

and a serpent bit him.

²⁰ Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not
light,

and gloom with no brightness in it?

²¹ "I hate, I despise your feasts,

and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings
and grain offerings,

I will not accept them;

and the peace offerings of your fattened animals,
I will not look upon them.

²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs;

to the melody of your harps I will not listen.

²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Basically, God was saying to them, “Every bit of your worship is offensive to me, because your hearts are evil.” “And you think The Day of The Lord is going to be a good day for you... Uh-Uh... Not until you start living with justice, it’s not...”

And this is how the image of Darkness and Light fits in here.

As Christians/Disciples of Jesus, we are children of the light. We belong to the day. We don’t belong to the night. Therefore, let us be, what we are. If I belong to “the day”, I should live, as a “child of the light”

In Amos, the people of Israel, were supposed to be the people of God. But they did not reflect that. They didn’t reflect God’s holiness/righteousness/justice... Therefore, for them, the Day of The Lord would be a day of darkness... Like running away from a lion and running into a bear...

We, are children of the light, therefore be, what we are. Be awake. And be sober.

Now, when we use the metaphor of light vs darkness / day vs night, it’s easy to grasp the concept of good vs evil / God vs

Satan.... but here, the image of light vs darkness brings in another contrast, and that is the contrast between “wakefulness” and “sleep”.

If we are children of the light/day, then daytime is no time for sleeping. We gotta be awake!!!

Now of course, that doesn't mean “You never go to bed”. It's a metaphor. The image is all about heading towards the Day of The Lord. Jesus is coming. And when He comes, He comes as the righteous and just Judge. It will be a day of vindication and justice for the righteous, and a day of condemnation for the wicked.

And as children of the Light, our eyes are wide open to this (we are awake to it). But most are not. Most, are completely oblivious to the coming Day of The Lord.

Now, with awareness, comes response.

There was a lot of rain, Tuesday night. Wednesday morning, I tipped 103mm out of our rain gauge, and that was in addition to the 100mm we had in the week leading up to it.

And on Wednesday morning, I woke up just before 5am. And I heard coming from the bathroom, the glugging of water (glug glug glug).... Let me tell you, that is not the sound you want to have coming from your bathroom and toilet.

I jumped out of bed and ran into the bathroom. With wakefulness came awareness. I was aware that something was dreadfully wrong. “Awareness” demanded immediate

action. The towns sewers had been overloaded with stormwater, and that causes the whole sewerage system to back up. And so I had to make sure it wasn't going to fill up and flood our house with sewerage...

With wakefulness, comes awareness. With awareness, comes response...

Spiritually, true wakefulness/awareness of the coming of the Day of The Lord, demands immediate and ongoing action. It demands a spiritual response (to turn to Jesus, repent of sin and believe in Him), and it demands a practical, living response – to live as children of the Light. And the image we have here, is one of “soberness”.

Jesus is coming like a thief in the night. He will appear instantly. It is a sudden inevitability. Now, I don't know about you, but I really, really don't want to be drunk when Jesus turns up...

And so, drunkenness vs sobriety, is a good example, but it's not just about “drunkenness”. It represents a whole lot of stuff.

Take the example of Amos.

In Amos, the people of Israel, were **supposed** to be God's people.

They:

- had their solemn assemblies (they went to church);

- offered their burnt offerings and grain offerings (they did what the religious law required to obtain holiness)
- sang their songs of praises to God

And God hated it.

Why? Because they:

- loved lies and hated the truth;
- did wrong, and they hated anyone who called them out on their wrong;
- trampled on the poor. They levied heavy taxes on the poor, while the wealthy lived in more and more lavish homes;
- punished the righteous; and
- turned aside from the needy...

As children of the light, let us be, children of the light. Children of the darkness may behave in that way, but not children of the light.

When Jesus returns, (and He will) let Him find us:

- living in righteousness;
- speaking the truth;
- loving our neighbour;
- being generous to the poor;
- not turning away, those who are genuinely in need;

Let Him find us:

- caring for the widow and the orphan;
- tending to the elderly and the sick;
- visiting the lonely and the outcast...

Jesus is coming. This is no time for sleeping **keep awake and be sober.**

Now, to be a Christian. It **begins** by:

- repenting of sin;
- believing in Him;
- surrendering our whole life to Him
- receiving Him as Lord (which means master).

That's where it begins. And at that point, because Jesus is Lord, we become "Disciples of Jesus" and we follow Him.

We:

- Love what He loves;
- value what He values;
- do what He does; and
- reject evil, and choose good, because He is good...

As children of the Light, we are called to a higher ethic.
As Disciples of Jesus, we are called to Christ-likeness.

Righto: In V8 we come to the great triad of Faith; Hope; and Love, only In 1st Thessalonians, it's in a different order. The focus of this letter, is the **hope** that we have. That's why he lists it as the third point. It builds up to the hope.

Faith; Love; Hope. And he uses the image of spiritual armour. V⁸ ... **since we belong to the day, let us be**

sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love....

Be in no doubt: Being a good person (**alone**) will not save me on the Day of The Lord. “Trusting in one’s **own** righteousness” is what’s called “self-righteousness”, and God hates the self-righteous. And we get that, don’t we... We get turned off by people who come across as being all “self-righteous”... And usually “self-righteousness” and “hypocrisy” go hand in hand.

Our breastplate – That which covers our heart – is “faith”. We believe. We believe in Jesus. He is:

- the One who saves;
- the One who takes our sins away;
- the One who rose from the dead to bring us life.

Without faith, there is no forgiveness/grace/mercy...

But genuine faith, must be a matter of the heart. Love. We love, because He loved us first. Faith and love go hand in hand. If I don’t have love, then I’d be in the same boat as Israel, when Amos ripped into them... They were fulfilling empty religious law, but their hearts weren’t in it, and we know that God wasn’t in it, because they did not love.

And in Amos’ day, they believed The Day of The Lord would be a good day for them, but no, it would be a day of darkness for them...

And then there’s “hope”. Faith; leads to Love; leads to Hope – the hope of salvation.

We talked about “hope” a few weeks ago. It’s **not** a hope like “I hope I win Gold Lotto”... It is a sure and certain hope. It is a destiny.

...

In this letter, when Paul talks about “us” or “you”, He’s talking about Christians. When He wrote this letter to the Thessalonians, he addressed it **To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:**

Alright, this is not a promise for everyone. This is not a destiny for everyone. He is speaking of the destiny of those who are **in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.** And the destiny, is the hope of salvation.

V⁹ 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 [died] we might live with him.

No wonder we sing about the grace/mercy/great love of God...

The destiny we have, is to be saved through our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other name that can save.

That's why Jesus died for us, so that we might live with Him...

What an amazing blessing this is. When Jesus returns, (on The Day of The Lord), yes it will be a day of judgment, but not for those who are living in the light. We are not destined for wrath. We are destined for life.

This is the great hope – the sure and certain hope of the Christian faith. And so, when we consider the coming of the Lord Jesus, we approach The Day of The Lord with Faith, Love, and Hope.

And in summary, there's 3 actions we should take.

1. Let us be what we are.

We are children of the Light. Live as children of the light.

- Be awake
(fully expectant of the return of Jesus);
- Be sober
(living in holiness and righteousness).

2. Encourage one another.

When things are tough, encourage one another, that Jesus is coming, and what a glorious day that will be. It is our destiny, to have life (with Him).

BTW, sometimes we might think that “life” is the best part of the blessing, but to be with Jesus, that's the best part of the blessing...

3. build one another up, just as you are doing.

We're in this together (you and I). We need one another. For those who are in Christ, the Day of The Lord is not a day of misery/darkness. It is a day of light, and life with Christ. Let's build one another up, by reminding each other of this.

Faith;
Love;
Hope of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ....
That's our destiny

Questions?

Lord,
our prayer today, is "Come Lord Jesus".
Lord, we give You thanks,
that you have called us to the Light.

Fill us with faith, love, and hope.

And help us to live as Your thankful children,

- Loving one another;
- loving our neighbour;
- Living in holy righteousness;
- Dispensing justice and mercy,

in the Name of Jesus,
And for Your glory,

Amen.