

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

September 11, 2022



SCRIPTURE

5 Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ²for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

COMMENTARY

1 Thessalonians 5:1. Although Paul was still writing concerning the coming of Christ, he shifted his focus away from how the Lord will come to what that coming will mean for different people. Evidently the Thessalonians had been taught concerning the return of Christ, for Paul began by saying, about times and dates we do not need to write to you. He then went on to reinforce what he must have talked with them about. The “dates” and “times” can be translated as epochs and crises. This phrase refers to a time period and to the conditions of a particular time. Both are secrets, hidden with God (Acts 1:7), not known by anyone else, even the angels or Jesus (Matt. 24:36).

5:2. Paul declared, The Lord will come like a thief in the night. This possibly refers to the “times” in verse 1. The imagery is taken from Jesus’ teaching in Luke 12:39–40: “If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” The suddenness and surprise of Christ’s coming was well understood. A thief does not call up and ask if he can stop by at 2:30 in the morning. He just comes ... when most people are sleeping.

5:3. Paul expanded on Christ’s return by using the imagery of a pregnant woman’s labor pains. Just when everyone is thinking things are fine, when no one seems worried or concerned, when life is going well, then Christ appears. But the contrast is even more dramatic. People are saying and thinking peace and safety, while destruction is actually what happens. The people who will be caught by surprise are the unbelievers, the great masses of people throughout the world. It is not clear whether they are feeling secure and well economically and politically, or whether they feel “safe” spiritually, believing there is no God to worry about. Whatever the source of their security, it will be suddenly and irrevocably shattered: they will not escape. The destruction is not physical death, but the spiritual separation and judgment which Christ brings. Christ the judge has come at last, and the verdict is hopeless ruin, the loss of all that gives purpose. Like a woman



in labor, the judgment comes upon the unbelieving world suddenly, inevitably, with pain. There is no reversing the matter.

MAIN POINT

No one knows when Christ will come again. It is a secret kept with God. But Christ will come.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.
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When was a time you were surprised by a circumstance or caught off guard?

Was that event something for which you could or should have been prepared? Explain.

What is a future potential event or circumstance you are preparing for now? Why do you want to be prepared for that?

In 1999, many people around the world prepared for the Y2K bug—a problem in the coding of computerized systems that was expected to wreak havoc, bringing down computer system infrastructures in banks and power plants, as the year changed from 1999 to 2000. As it turned out, actual problems at the turn of the century were minimal. In 2020, however, few were prepared for the logistics of a global pandemic that occurred and caused numerous problems. Jesus's return to earth is a future reality that fascinates some people, while others consider it as having little consequence. Some prepare for Jesus's return, and others do not. In Paul's letter to the Thessalonian believers, he taught that while we cannot know when Christ will return, we can know that when He does, the time to prepare will have passed.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

- ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-3.

Why do you think people worry about the second coming? Is worry an appropriate response?



What facts do we know about Jesus’s return? Where else does Scripture teach on this event?

Which is harder for you—to be confident of the fact of Jesus’s return or to remain blissfully ignorant of the exact time and circumstances of His return? Why?

Questions about the details of Jesus’s return are not new—even the earliest disciples asked these questions (Acts 1:7). The words used for times and seasons refer to dates and circumstances. Many people throughout history have looked at the state of the world around them and assumed Jesus would return. When will He return? What events will let us know Jesus is coming? Jesus told His disciples that He did not even know these details Himself(Matthew24:36), but only the Father. It is not productive to try and figure out what is known only to God.

What is the day of the Lord?

How did the Old Testament prophets use this term (see Isaiah 10:3-4 and Malachi 4:1, for example)? How did Paul?

What does the analogy of Jesus coming “like a thief in the night” mean?

How would you describe the behavior of a thief?

- READ LUKE 12:39-40.

For what purpose did Jesus use this same analogy? The day of the Lord was used throughout the Old Testament to refer to the day when God would save and justify the faithful and punish the unrighteous. Paul used it to refer to the second coming. The imagery of a thief is not uncommon in the New Testament and is often used to describe a sudden and unexpected moment. Though for the people of God this should be a welcomed event because it represents the day of their salvation. Its sudden nature means that the specific time and date are not something believers should devote much time trying to figure out in advance. Even though we can’t know the time, we should still be prepared.

What is the danger in not being prepared for the day of the Lord?

What is the danger in building your life around worldly peace and security?

Who are the people Paul referred to in verse 3? Why do they believe they have peace and security? Do you know people like this?

Paul used another metaphor of a woman in labor pains.

What does this add to our understanding of the Lord’s return?



Jesus's return will be like labor pains for a pregnant woman—an experience that often begins suddenly and from which there is no escape. The people Paul referred to are unbelievers—those who have failed to see the importance of the day of the Lord because they have chased comforts in this life. Jesus urged His disciples to be ready because they will not expect His coming (Matthew 24:24).

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What do “you yourself know very well” about Jesus’s return?

Where do you struggle to rest in the knowledge of Christ’s return? Where, besides Jesus, do you strive to find peace and security (for example, building wealth, climbing the corporate ladder, etc.)?

Who are the people in your life who are seeking peace and security outside of Jesus and His gospel message? What are some ways you can help them become ready for the day of the Lord?

PRAAYER

As you close in prayer, ask God to help you convey the urgency of responding to the gospel to those who do not know Jesus. Confess to God the things that distract you from living in expectation of Him, and ask Him to give you renewed focus on eternal matters.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group to look ahead to next week’s scripture passage. We will pause our study of 1 Thessalonians and study the importance of worship in the life of a disciple of Christ.

September 18, 2022 --- Hebrews 10:14-18

