

Second Sunday Of End Time - Last Judgment

November 6, 2011

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 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. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (NIV)

I'd like to try something a little different in place of a sermon. Today, instead of listening to me preach I will give you all a test. I have here a long list of questions. Start thinking right now about everything you remember about the book of Amos. I will ask each one of you a question from and about Amos and if you get your one question right you will pass but if you get it wrong you will fail. Whether you get it right or not will determine your standing in our church. Are you ready? Are you prepared?

Okay, I'm not really going to give each of you a quiz on the book of Amos that will determine your status in our congregation. Perhaps for the first time some of you are actually happy I will just be preaching another sermon. But my goal was to get your hearts racing a little bit. The unexpected has a tendency to do that to us. I wanted you to start thinking and asking yourself some questions. Am I ready? Was I prepared for such a test? What would be the consequences of being caught off guard, of being unprepared, of not being ready for something really important?

This morning our attention is focused on the most important and truly final exam where it will be either pass or fail. We look toward Judgment Day when our Lord Jesus will return with all His angels to judge both the living and the dead. What the Lord wants of us is very clear. He wants us ready. He wants us prepared. He wants us awake and waiting. Listen closely dear friends as our God tells us through His apostle Paul: **There is No Time for Sleeping! The Lord is Coming. We are Children of the Day.**

After addressing some questions the Christians had about dying, Paul now addresses some other concerns they must have had about the end times. Perhaps some people wondered if Jesus really is coming back to earth as Judge. Or maybe some are worried and frightened about facing their Judge on this day. The first thing Paul makes clear is they are not to spend their time trying to figure out when this Day will come. Many people have foolishly and futilely tried over the years. I believe once again this year we had another attempt to predict the end. Once again that prediction was wrong.

That's why Paul tells them "*about the times and dates we do not need to write to you*". No one knows when the Lord will return. Jesus says not even the angels know when He will come again. The exact time of His return is not what is important. Paul reminds them that they had been taught this already.

Paul says, "*you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.*" What thieves announce their coming? Jesus tells us to "*keep watch for you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into*" (Matthew 24:42-43). Not knowing when, or if a thief is coming to our home or business, we continually take precautions, locking doors and maybe even installing alarm systems. In the same way, since we do not know when Jesus will return, Jesus tells us to always be ready - to keep watch. Since we know for sure He is coming there is no time for sleeping! Today is the day to make sure our spiritual house is in order! The Day will come when we do not expect it.

Since this Day is unexpected, many will be unprepared. Isn't this a terribly sad thing to think about? Many will not be ready. They will be unprepared to meet their Judge and Maker. They will be sleeping - spiritually dead. Paul writes, "*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.*" The worst part is that many of these people think they are completely safe. Maybe they feel they are good people who have done enough good things in their life to stand before God. Some will be thinking the end is still way in the future. Others have no care for God and live as such with carefree, immoral lives. Some believe there were even scoffers in the city of Thessalonica who began taunting the Christians: "*Where is your Savior?*" "*He is not coming, everything you are doing to serve this so called God of yours is in vain.*" But one day while people are busy eating and drinking and doing all they can to be merry, while they are saying: "*Peace and safety, destruction will come on them suddenly.*" The original language literally says for emphasis "*Sudden the destruction!*" Paul compares this to the labor of a pregnant woman. Once the labor begins there is no escape, no time to turn back and change your mind now. So it will be when Christ returns, no one will escape the judgment of our just Judge. The Day is coming! The Lord's return is certain and as Paul writes in his letter to Corinth: "*we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.*" All those who are unprepared, who are sleeping, will be in for a very rude waking indeed!

But Paul tells the Thessalonian Christians they are different, "*but you, brothers, are not in darkness.*" Therefore, he writes, when Christ returns it "*should not surprise you like a thief.*" He says, "*You are all sons of the light and sons of the day.*" Paul adds: "*We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.*" They were different. Paul tells them: "*You are prepared. You are not like those who are sleeping. You are ready for this Day to come.*" And by grace so are you and me. We are ready because Jesus has made us ready. We are clothed in His righteousness. Our sins are washed away in His blood. We have been called out of darkness and into His wonderful light. We have been called to faith in Jesus.

We are different too. Now Paul says: "*So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and*

those who get drunk, get drunk at night.” Simply put, Paul tells us to live like the people God has made us to be! We are children of the day. As children of the day we are to distance ourselves from those who still remain in darkness. Our attitudes, our thoughts, our lives and actions are to be different.

Paul goes on: *“But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet..”* We have here, as elsewhere in the Bible, the picture of putting on the armor of God. We have here the great trio of Holy Spirit’s greatest gifts to us. We wear faith and love as a breastplate, a piece of armor to cover our chest and defend us from any blows or arrows, a piece of armor to protect us from the attacks of the devil and the world. We are put on the *“hope of salvation”* as a helmet. This helmet will sustain us by protecting our heads. It will guard our minds from being swamped by the troubles and difficulties that come over way. This hope is what gives us endurance. *“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Now is not the time to be spiritually lazy. We need God’s armor! The battle will be intense. Now is not a time to be sleeping. The devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh are constantly trying to drag us back into the darkness. Too often we let up our guard. We don’t have the sense of urgency that Paul, that Jesus, encourages from us. We don’t faithfully use our time and the opportunities we have to be in God’s Word and receive His sacrament. We are not always putting on the full armor as we should. That’s why these reminders this Sunday in the church year gives us are so important. The Day is coming. If you are slipping or have slipped into the darkness of sin and unbelief don’t think that you are safe and will have plenty of time for God and church later. If you have friends or loved ones that need to repent, that do not know about Jesus, don’t keep saying I will talk to them another day. There is no time for sleeping. The Day is coming! We are children of the day.

I don’t think I could ever get tired of hearing this truth: we are children of the day. We are not lost in the dark. We are not sleeping. We are ready and prepared. This is true because: *“He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”* We are ready because Jesus, God’s own Son, was sent into the outer dark. The Son who did what we didn’t by always being self-controlled and alert, there on the cross, suffered and died for us. Jesus went into the darkness of the grave and then back from it so that we may now live with Him. This is the good news that gets us through life, and the good news that prepares us for eternal life.

Dear friends, you may not be ready and prepared for a test on the book of Amos. Perhaps that is a good reminder for all of us to remain students of God’s Word. But thank God today that you are prepared! You are ready! You trust in Jesus as your Savior. Because of Jesus, we’ve already aced the final exam! That means Judgement Day is not a day to fear. It is not a Day to dread. It is not a Day that will now catch us off guard unexpected. It is a Day to look forward to, it is a day of redemption, it is the Day we and all who believe will be taken to live with Him. Until that Day comes may our gracious God keep our eyes, and hearts, and hands, and all we are wide awake for His return. Amen.

