

A Thief In The Night

Ryan Goodwin

We have to wait for many things. Anticipation greets us as we eagerly await a dessert. The call from a potential employer tends to bring great anxiety. We feel nervousness over the grade on a test. As we wait, we feel many feelings as well. Some of those feelings can be positive, leading us to be prepared for an upcoming event, while other feelings have quite negative effects. When we are not equipped to deal with a scenario, such as a driver's test, an awkward social situation, or a surprise inspection by our boss, some of those negative feelings start making themselves known!

Such is the case with the end of the world as well. God is coming, but we do not know when! It will happen, not when we have pinpointed it or followed a mathematical formula or properly interpreted the "signs of the times", but when God decides it is time. *"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up"* (2 Peter 3:10). We are no better at predicting the climactic cataclysm than any other uninspired people in history.

In response to this, Peter makes a vital point, *"Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God"* (2 Peter 3:11-12a). Just what kind of people should we be, knowing that the Lord will come in such a manner? Are we really living with the constant expectation that God's judgment is coming? To answer these kinds of questions, I want to take special note of 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11:

5:1 "Now as to the times and epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you." 5:2 "For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night." 5:3 "While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape."

When an event is imminent, expectation is the natural result. We know that God is coming; whether it is sooner or later is unknown. But since He is coming sometime, we need to be constantly expecting it, waiting for it, longing for it. More importantly, we need to be ready for it.

Notice from the text that there is a definite difference in *expectation* between "you" and "they"; as Christians, we know that God is coming in judgment, so we expect it and are able to prepare ourselves for it. For unbelievers, they will not be prepared because they have wasted their time making themselves feel better. They cry, *"peace and safety"* so that people will not panic or turn to God. It reminds me of the false prophets in Jeremiah 23:17. These are not men sent by God, yet they speak as though they know what His will is! But such men are not pleasing to God! *"I did not send these prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, then they would have announced My words to My people, and would have turned them back from their evil way and from the evil in their deeds"* (Jeremiah 23:21-22).

5:4 "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief;" 5:5 "for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness;" 5:6 "so then let us not sleep as other do, but let us be alert and

sober.” 5:7 “For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.” 5:8 “But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.”

Notice some of the characteristics displayed in this section of our text. We are to be sober, first and foremost, not necessarily free from alcohol [although that, too, is important], but free from the degrading effects of the drunkenness of life. It becomes too easy sometimes to get caught up in the excitement, fun, and ultimate vanity of living life “to its fullest” as the adage goes. Unfortunately, living life “to its fullest” often means rejecting God to His face. Running away with an adulteress, getting drunk from intoxicants, wasting money and resources on vain things. . . these are all the activities that lead to the open rejection of God’s divine will for Christian living.

Let us not be like the church of Sardis, then, alive in name only, but dead in our works. In Revelation 3:1-3 notice the state in which these Christians were living. They were dead, just like those of our text who are asleep and drunk. These Christians of Sardis were thoroughly unprepared for the Day of the Lord because they were not waiting for it, watching for it. They were asleep in their works. But we are not asleep! We are not of the night! We are not the kind of people who waste life for temporary pleasure and passion! We are watchful sentries, on guard, ready, anxious for the coming Day of the Lord. Notice carefully Ezekiel 33:1-9. Like watchmen over a city, we too must be prepared to sound the trumpet when it is required of us. When the time comes to proclaim the Truth, are we asleep at our post?