

Stay Alert

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[0:00] A soldier on guard waits in the night. He's alone, and it's quiet.

! Do you know how he feels?

Maybe you've been driving down the road, and you're feeling sleepy, and you're fighting it. Well, some of you know how he feels. I've seen you fighting it on Sunday afternoons.

You know you shouldn't, but your eyes get heavy. And you want to fall asleep so bad. Well, drowsiness, it's a spiritual problem, too.

Not just a problem that we face on Sunday afternoons. It's a problem every Christian faces.

Because it is nighttime. We are not living in the day. It is night, and it is long, and it is very tiresome.

[1:14] And so, if you're a Christian, this is not someone else's problem. You're not beyond this.

This is your problem. This is my problem. And it's one reason to remember the Lord's death until he comes.

So, turn, if you will, to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. Paul is talking about the second coming of the Lord.

And we're going to read what he says, what we should be doing in the meantime. Second coming of the Lord.

What do we do in the meantime? How do we stay awake? 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. Look at what he says in verse 4. But you brothers, 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.

[2:27] For those who sleep, sleep at night. Well, you see what Paul is saying. We're like third shift workers. And children, you know, first shift, they go to work at 7 or 8 or 9 and they work until the afternoon.

But third shift workers, they go in late at night when it is dark and they work until the morning. So that's us.

Everyone else is asleep. Everyone else is having a good time. We're at work. It's time to be alert.

It's time to have our wits about us. Paul goes on in verse 7.

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. So why do we put on faith and hope and love, ready, prepare ourselves for battle? Why stay alert?

[3:29] He goes on. For God, here's the reason. 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.

So do you see Paul's argument? Stay alert. Don't go to sleep. Be self-controlled. Have your wits about you. Why? Because we belong to the day.

Not to the night. We belong to the day. And Christ died for us. One reason we remember the Lord's death until he comes is to keep us sober-minded, clear-headed, to keep our wits about us, to remember what we're about.

The Lord's Supper is a meal to eat at nighttime when you're waiting for the day. It's like a shot of caffeine on that long drive home.

[4:35] So you're in the long drive. It's late at night. Everyone in the minivan is asleep behind you. And you need your caffeine to stay awake. That's what the Lord's Supper is like.

And so tonight I want to show you three truths from verse 10 to keep you awake, to keep you clear-headed, to keep you looking forward to the day, to the morning.
So three truths to keep you encouraged during this long night. And truth number one, you see it in verse 10, is, Christian, Jesus died for you.

He died for you. How easy those words come off our tongue. How easy they go into our ears. He died for you. He died for us.

Bertha Haig is a name that doesn't mean anything to any of you. And I don't know anything about her except this. On her gravestone in the cemetery in Plymouth, it says this.

[5:42] She gave up her life. In order that her infant daughter might live. I don't know what the story is. I don't know anything about her. But this is engraved permanently on her gravestone.

Bertha Haig died so her baby might live. And you know, when you've taken all the prepositional phrases out of verse 10, you know what you get down to.

You see what the kernel is. It says, he died so that we may live. He died so that we may live. What will keep you awake during this long night?

This thought. Jesus loved me and he died for me so that I could live. He gave me eternal life at the cost of his life.

I sinned and Jesus died for my sins in my place on my behalf. Not only have I sinned, but I was a sinner.

[6:42] Sin wasn't something extraneous outside of me. It was part and parcel of who I was. My heart was a crooked mess. So Bertha's baby was far more deserving.

Far more worthy than we ever were of Jesus dying for us. We didn't love God. We didn't love his commands. So God, the most glorious, God, all loving, God, the most loving kind, God, the father to his children.

That didn't move our hearts. There was no room in our hearts for him. Colossians says we were enemies in our minds because of our evil behavior. So we wanted to disobey.

And God said no, and so he was our enemy. He didn't clap his hands and cheer for us when we did what was wrong, and so we hated him for it. We can live with a God who says it's okay to do whatever you want.

There's plenty of gods out there that will agree with us. But this God who says no to us, no to our evil behavior, there's no room in our hearts for him. And so when other people disobeyed, we cheered them on, Romans says.

[7:52] Not only did we do it, we liked to see other people doing it. We were glad to have fellow rebels with us. We were together in this. And so we hated what was most glorious.

We despised what was most sacred. We disobeyed what was most right. We loved what was most wicked. And we praised what was most despicable.

And we sinned against his law, and we sinned against his goodness. All of God's kindness, all of his love, it didn't win our hearts.

It didn't move us to love him. And so what do we deserve for all of this? Death. Death. Death is not outrageous.

Death is not disproportionate. Death is not strict. Death is not overdoing it. Death is what is right.

[8:55] It is what sinners deserve. You see, we didn't cross the line between right and wrong. We didn't stumble across the line. We ran right across it. And we didn't just happen to wander into the disobedience, into the forbidden ground.

We marched into it, and we did it with our tongue stuck out at him. And it wasn't a mistake. We didn't just stumble into it.

It was rebellion. It was a hard-hearted, my fist in God's face, not caring what he says. I will do what I want. And it takes lots of shapes and lots of forms, and sometimes it's really overt and obvious, and other times it's just, I don't care what you say.

I'm going to do what I want anyways. It wasn't a mistake. It was rebellion. It was treason. The Bible calls it prostitution, adultery, rebellion.

All the worst things that we think about doing wrong against people, it was what we did against God. It was defiling. It was abusing.

[10:05] And the blood is on our hands. The filth is on our hands. We have done it. We deserve death.

But Jesus died for us. But he died in our place. God didn't appoint us to suffer wrath, verse 9 says.

Yes, wrath is just. Wrath is right. And when we have our right minds about us, we say, that's what I deserve. I have that coming.

Wrath is right, but God does not appoint us to wrath. Instead, he doesn't cause us to suffer wrath.

He appoints us to receive salvation. So how can we stumble and bumble through life?

How can we live like drunks, not knowing what's going on, living for tonight, living for our pleasures, you know, a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest?

[11:00] Well, God's grace won't let us live. Well, God's grace won't let us live that way. Asleep to that day. Asleep to what God wants for me.

God's grace won't let me. God's mercy won't let us. God's love won't let us. Others might sleep. But Jesus died for me so that I could live. He died so I could live.

And so let me live. He took the wrath. He took the filth, the blame, the guilt, the shame. And he took it all and he suffered justice for me in my place.

And so how can I live like the rest? We are living most clear headed, most sober minded, most with our wits about us when we're realizing I deserve to go to hell.

And yet Jesus took my punishment for me. So how can I live like the rest? How can I fall asleep on him? Who live for me? Well, that's the first truth.

[11:58] And that's what communion reminds us of. That Jesus died for us. So that helps me stay awake. That helps me stay clear headed.

That helps me keep my wits about me in this life. That's the first truth. Here's the second. Jesus died. Jesus died. So we could be reunited with the saints who have gone before.

Jesus died. So we could be reunited with the saints who have gone before. You see that there. He died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

The Thessalonians were confused. And they were discouraged. Because they were somehow or other thinking that those who had died had missed the day of the Lord.

That they'd missed out on something great. Maybe they were thinking those people were dead, gone for good. We'll never see them again. And so you could see how they were so discouraged, so downhearted, wanting to fall asleep.

[13:05] Because the people that I love are gone. The people that I had grown close to in the church, gone. And I'll never see them again.

And so they were grieving like people who had no hope. And Paul says, no, no. No, no, no. Jesus died. So that whether we're awake or we're asleep, whether we're alive or we're dead, when Christ comes, we might live together with him.

Jesus died to reunite us with those who have gone before. And that's encouraging. Now some who have shared this very meal with us.

Who have sat beside us. Who have broke bread with us. And drank from the cup with us. Who have sat in this very room with us are gone. We shared this meal.

We united ourselves with Christ. We shared in Christ together with them. We joined our hearts with them around the table. And now they're gone.

[14:14] And we feel like an arm is missing. We feel like the people that should be here, they aren't all here. And Paul's word is, don't lose heart.

Don't lose heart. Don't get so discouraged. Jesus died for us and he won't lose a single one of them. He won't lose a single one. He died so that we could live together.

So that we could be reunited. Someone once asked me. If I thought we would be able to recognize each other when we got to heaven.

Would we know each other in heaven? Well, what do you think? What does Paul teach here? What does Paul teach here?

He's saying, we'll be together. We'll be together. Those who are alive at his coming and those who have gone on, we'll all be together. We'll be together again.

[15:11] And that wouldn't mean anything now or it wouldn't mean anything then if we didn't recognize each other. That is what one part of the great glory of Christ's coming is we're all going to be back together again, completely united.

And that wouldn't mean anything if we were going to be strangers in heaven. And so Jesus died so that we could be together again and we'll know each other in the flesh. We'll recognize each other. Yes, we'll be different, but there'll be something about us that we can see that. Yes, that is Jim. Yes, that is me. I've seen him. I've lived with him. I know him.

We'll be, we'll know each other in the flesh. We'll see and know each other. We'll live together again. And communion reminds us of that. Because remember Jesus said, I won't eat this again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.

I won't eat this meal until I eat it again in the kingdom of God. There is another meal to come.

Another meal to come. And what is a great meal for except to bring people together?

[16:19] So at Thanksgiving and at Christmas, we have these great feasts. Why do we do that?

Yes, we like food. But the primary reason is it's so good to be with one another and enjoying all these physical enjoyments together.

We enjoy each other. We enjoy each other. To be with each other in the flesh. It's a very physical thing, isn't it? It's not the same having an iPad there with FaceTime and there's that person sitting in the chair.

That's not what we want. We want them physically there. And that's one way communion isn't like other things that we do here.

It isn't necessarily even like preaching. Communion is a very different sort of thing. And that's why I think sometimes it's hard for us to know what we should be thinking about.

How should we think about this? Because it's not purely mental. Communion is not purely up here.

It's not something that we only do in our minds.

[17:20] In preaching, we listen and we hear and it's going on in our minds. But you hold the bread. You look at the cup. You eat it.

You see it. You taste it. It speaks to your senses. It presents truth to your senses. And it says this isn't just mind games. This isn't just something that goes on in your head.

Christ really did die. Physically die. And his body was really broken. And his blood really did flow. And I really need him to live. And there really is another meal coming. There's a physical reunion coming.

Where I'll be with my loved ones again. Those who have died in Christ. I'll be with them. And just like I ate with them once. I'll eat with them again.

[18:19] Christ died to reunite us. And so take heart. Jesus died for us. So that whether we are awake or asleep. We may live together with him.

That's the second truth. To keep you awake. To not get discouraged. To not fall asleep. You're going to be with your loved ones again. Those who have died in Christ. You're going to be with them again.

Because Christ died. Now here's the third truth. Jesus died for us. So that we might live together with him.

One reason we find the night so long. Is because we're separated from him. And one reason we have such a hard time staying awake.

Is it doesn't seem like the night is ever going to end. But Jesus died. And so we are going to be with him. We are going to live with him.

[19:18] Jesus' death guarantees we'll live with him. At the end of the night is Jesus Christ. When the day breaks. What we will see is Jesus Christ coming in his glory.

When the long night is over. Jesus Christ will greet us in the flesh. And so that day is not going to break like every other day. That day is not going to break like a day on the farm.

With a rooster crowing. Look at what he says in chapter 4 in verse 16. This is no rooster waking everyone up. Look at what he says.

Verse 16. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven. With a loud command. With a voice of the archangel. And with a trumpet call of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

So Jesus himself. Did you notice that? For the Lord himself will come down. Jesus himself will be there. And so it's not going to be a substitute. There's no messenger.

[20:21] There's no herald. There's no representative. It's Jesus himself coming. He's coming down. And in verse 17. After that.

We who are still alive and are left. Will be caught up together with them in the clouds. To meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

You see. Jesus died to have us. And he's going to have us. He died so that we could live with him.

And we will live with him. He died so that he could be with us.

And we will be with him. And we'll be with him forever. See the end of Jesus' death. The point of his coming is for us.

And him to live together. And so sin will be done. No more sin. Jesus died. And death will be gone. And no more. Because Jesus died.

[21:19] And the long parting will be over. And the day will come. The king will come. And every day will be blessed. And so brothers and sisters. Jesus.

The glorious son of God died for us. And he won't lose any that he died for. He won't lose your loved ones who have died in him.

And he won't lose you. He's going to have you. And so the night is long. But the day is coming. And Christ is coming. And we do this. We remember the Lord's death. We celebrate in this meal. We do this only until he comes.

So every communion is one communion closer. Every communion is one communion closer. Every communion is a communion that we'll never do again.

[22:17] Next time we celebrate this. If the Lord has not come. We'll be one communion closer. We're marching forward. The day is getting closer and closer and closer.

So you're closer to the Lord. You're closer to seeing him. Than the first day that you believed. And you're closer to his face. And you're closer to his voice. And you're closer to putting shadows and signs behind you.

Then you won't look at bread. You won't look at the cup. You'll see him. And you'll eat with him. Tonight we eat with him by faith.

But this meal says. Another one is coming. And there's more glory to see. Your lover is waiting for you. And he's coming in the clouds of glory.

And when you meet him. You'll be with him forever. Dark. Dark hath been the midnight. But the day spring is at hand.

[23:17] Oh Christ. He is the fountain. The deep sweet well of love. The streams on earth I've tasted. More deep. I'll drink above. There to an ocean fullness.

His mercy doth expand. And glory. Glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land. The bride eyes not her garment. But her dear bridegroom's face.

I will not gaze at glory. But I'm my king of grace. Not on the crown he gifteth. But on his pierced hand. The lamb is all the glory.

Of Emmanuel's land. And he died for us. So that we could be there with him. Amen.