

Preparing for the Return of Christ

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Date: 10 January 2010

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[0:00] The word given us to hide in our hearts. Chapter four and verse 13. Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep or to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope.

We believe that Jesus died and rose again. And so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

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

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. Therefore, encourage each other with these words. 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.

[1:21] 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.

[2:30] Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up just as, in fact, you are doing. They meant to retire well, but life always seemed to get in the way.

There's always a new computer to buy. There's always a new car to get. And they told themselves, there was always more time. You have more time. And when Jared turned 50, he sat down with Beth and he said, we have to get serious about this.

We have to start saving for retirement or I'm never going to be able to quit my job. And they started paying off their credit cards. And December 25th rolled around like it usually does.

And they charged him right up again. And one thing led to another. And suddenly, they're 60. And things are pretty much desperate now.

But it's hard. It is so hard to change the momentum of 40 years. But it's going to be changed. At 64, Jared is forced out of his job and they have nothing saved.

[3:36] And so, retirement has come. And what they meant to be comfortable is anything but comfortable. It's become dismal.

And the house fell apart year after year. Their clothes became ragged. And rice and beans and beans and rice was not just a motto.

It was a necessity. Now, some of you are like Jared and Beth. Not in the financial sense, but in the spiritual sense. We just read about Christ coming back.

And Christ is coming back. And you know that. And you know that it's something that you should prepare for. It's waiting for you. But there's always something more important to do.

There's always something better, more important to do. Well, when Christ comes, how is he going to find you? He's going to find you as a thief in the night.

[4 : 36] And you will be thinking, I need to get ready for his coming someday. But he will be there. And you won't be ready. And he will come in all of his glory. And he will find you completely unprepared.

Well, you were saying peace and safety. Destruction will come upon you. So, if you're an unbeliever, what should you do to prepare for Christ's coming?

You should repent. Repent. That means change direction. Change what you're doing. Change the way you're thinking. Change your attitude towards God and Christ.

Stop thinking, I have something better to do. I need to do something different. Stop thinking, I'm okay because I go to church. I'm okay because I do this or that.

God requires absolute, perfect righteousness. And he will demand it of you when Christ comes. Because he is an absolutely perfect God.

[5 : 43] How will you have that righteousness? You can't manufacture it yourself. You can't make up for what you've done because it's in the past. And the past cannot be fixed.

And so, what can you do to get that righteousness? You repent and you believe. You come to Christ for that righteousness. Because in him, in Jesus Christ, is all the righteousness that a sinner needs to prepare for that last day.

And that is the deal. And that is a wonderful deal. And so, what do you do when you find a good deal? You take it. You take it. And this is a deal that you can't pass up.

Because you need righteousness for this coming day. And Jesus Christ is the only one who can give it to you. And now, he's offering it to you.

So, take it. But brothers and sisters, what do you do to prepare for that great day that is coming? That hope that we have that we talked about last week.

[6 : 47] How do you live to prepare for that in light of it? The comfort that you will experience on that day is directly related to how you are preparing for it today.

How you're living in light of it today. And you say, well, you prepare for things that are important to you. You prepare for retirement. If you're going to live in light of retirement, what you say is, you know what?

65 or 67 or whenever is going to come. And I need to live like that's reality. And so, the more you think about retirement, the more you bank on it, you depend on it coming, the better prepared you are when it comes around.

The better, the more you will enjoy it when it gets here. So, how can you enjoy Jesus Christ coming? How can you prepare for that? You bank on it.

You depend on it. And Paul is going to tell us how we do that. How do we live in light of the second coming? It is coming. So, how do we prepare for it? It's in our text.

[7 : 56] We have four things. Four ways to prepare for the second coming of Christ. First, live as who you are.

If you are a believer, the first thing you need to do is live as who you are. You see that in verses 4 and 5. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that the day should surprise you like a thief.

And this is the key sentence. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. Paul says you shouldn't be surprised when Christ comes. It shouldn't be like him coming as a thief in the night for you because you don't belong to the night.

You belong to the day. You are of the light. So, you're characterized by light. That's what it means to be a son of the day or son of the light is you're characterized by those things.

You belong to those things. And that's who you are. So, how do you prepare now for the second coming for that great day? You live as what you really are.

[8 : 58] You're not in darkness. You're not blinded to reality so that it should surprise you. Satan has blinded this world. He's blinded this world, but God has opened your eyes to the light.

And so, you're not stumbling and bumbling in the darkness. You see. You do see. And it's more than giving you knowledge.

God has fundamentally changed who you are. So, you're no longer a citizen of the night. You're no longer belong to the dark.

You're not a part of that kingdom so that you would do nighttime activities like going to sleep or getting drunk. Our citizenship is in heaven.

And we eagerly await a savior from there. The Lord Jesus Christ. And so, what has happened in our salvation? God has moved us from one realm to another.

[9:57] He's moved us out of darkness and into the light. He's moved us from one kingdom to another. When Paul wrote to the church in Colossae, to the Colossians, he thanked God for them.

Why? Because of this. He has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves.

God has done something grand for you. He's taken you from one kingdom into another. He has rescued you from the dominion of darkness.

And so, you live there. That's where you belong. That's the things that you used to do. You were citizens of that kingdom. But not anymore. That's not the way what you are.

That's not who you are. He's brought you into the light. And so now, if you are a believer, if that transfer has taken place, then you are embassy workers in the darkness.

[11:04] And you know how an embassy works. So, in Washington, D.C., the Russians have an embassy. And what an embassy is, is a building or a compound or something that one nation builds and maintains on another nation's soil.

So, the Russians own and operate the Russian embassy. And more than just owning a building, the embassy is considered as Russian soil.

It's Russian territory. It's under Russia's sovereignty. So, inside the Russian embassy, the U.S. Constitution has nothing to say.

It has no power. It's Russian law. It's Russian priorities that go in the Russian embassy. And that is what God has done for you.

He's moved you out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of his son. And so now, it's no longer darkness that reigns. And it's no longer you're living for their priorities.

[12:16] You're living for God and for his kingdom. And so, it's his rules that apply in your life. It's his priorities that go.

Well, we are different. And so, Paul says we should live different lives. The dark, the people in the dark, they're oblivious to Christ's coming.

They're blind to it. They're asleep to that reality. Have you ever played a trick on a person that's sleeping? And you know what I'm talking about.

They're sleeping in their hands out and you put shaving cream on it. And then you rub their face and then they splat. It's a really good joke if it comes off right. But it's all dependent on the fact that that person is completely oblivious.

And that is how the dark works. You're in the dark. You're asleep. And so, when Christ comes, it's going to be bad for you. Well, we shouldn't be living like that.

[13:22] We are not members of the night. Well, we should be alert. We should be self-controlled or sober-minded.

The word alert. Have you ever seen the Discovery Channel? And there's a leopard. And he is waiting.

He is alert as he sees a gazelle cross his vision. And he is ready to pounce. Every muscle is coiled. His ears are perked.

His eyes are wide open. He's ready for action. And that is what God has called us to do. To be. To be alert. It speaks of someone on guard duty.

In Nehemiah's time, remember the walls were torn down. And Nehemiah comes back and he rebuilds the walls. But there were still enemies all around. And so, what he did was he set up people to watch.

[14:25] They had to watch the gates at all times. And they could not fall asleep ever. Well, that is sort of what Paul is calling us to do.

Right now, enemies are all around us. And so, what is the proper position that we should have? We should be alert and ready. Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, said, Watch and pray lest you fall into destruction or into temptation.

So, temptation is lurking all around you. And how do you prevent yourself from falling? How do you keep from falling? You watch. And it's the same word.

You stay alert. Well, Paul says here, Because you are sons of the light, You're sons of the day, You should be alert. You should be on the guard. We are in a dangerous situation, brothers and sisters.

We are on enemy territory. And it is night time. And we have enemies surrounding us. And we, the only response that we could have, If we want to stay alive, Is to be alert.

[15 : 33] To watch out for our enemies. And he says we should stay sober-minded. Or self-controlled. The idea is that we should have our wits about us.

We should have our wits about us. You don't want a flighty space cadet on guard duty. Do you? You want someone who is self-controlled.

Who is watching out. So, we're watching on the front lines. And we want him, the person on guard, To stay sober. And so, we stay sober-minded. We keep our minds fastened on the most important things.

We keep it fastened on the truth. And we keep looking towards the day. If you're on guard duty in the middle of the night, What are you looking for? You're looking for the enemy.

That's true. But most of all, You're longing for the dawn. You're longing for the daytime to come. And you say, When will it come? When will it come?

[16 : 32] And brothers and sisters, That should be us. We need to live as we are. We don't belong to this world. We don't belong in the darkness or the night.

That we should act like the night. We should keep our wits about us. And so, we don't get drawn aside into the world's agenda. Because we're embassy workers here. And it's God's agenda that should be operating in our life.

And so, we keep focused on the second coming of Christ. When he will completely save us. So, how do you prepare for the second coming of Christ?

You live as who you are. You don't belong to this world. So, you don't live like that. Second, how do you prepare? You stay in your armor.

You stay in your armor. Look at verse 8. So, Paul's thinking about guard duty.

[17 : 35] And I think that leads him naturally to think about armor. He's thinking about military terms. And so, he naturally heads towards spiritual armor. In the NIV, it says, You keep putting on faith and love.

But, really, this is a one-time action. In the past, that has already happened. That has ongoing effects. And so, the point is that in our salvation, God has dressed us in our armor.

He has given us these things. We have been taught by God to love. And faith is a gift from God to us. And hope is God's work in us.

And so, he has dressed us. He has prepared us for the battle. And so, Paul is saying, Don't take your armor off. Keep it on and keep living out of it. That is how you prepare.

And this is absolutely vital to preparing for the second coming of Christ. If you're going to live in the light of the day, you must have faith. If you're going to live in light that that day is coming, then you must believe that it is coming.

[18 : 41] We must believe that God really intends to come. He's really intending to send Jesus Christ. He is going to raise the dead.

And those are facts. And when the way those facts become operative, the way they start working in our life, is through faith, when we believe them.

So, remember Jared and Beth. They didn't really, really believe that retirement was ever coming. It was an intellectual reality to them. They understood it in their minds, but it never sunk down into their heart where they started living out of that kind of reality.

In the same way, the second coming of Christ has to sink down into who we are. And until it starts shaping us, then we're not believing it like we ought.

[19 : 40] We need to keep believing until it becomes a subtle part of who we are. And so, Paul is saying, you have believed. God has given you faith. Keep believing.

And that faith will be a breastplate around you. It will protect you. It will protect you from getting cold. Why do we, as Christians, get cold and distracted?

Why do we get so caught up in this world? Well, a good part of it is our faith slips.

We lose track of what we should be thinking about. And it quits being so operative in our life. And so, Paul says, keep believing. And believe more and more.

And if you do, you'll be prepared and you'll be protected while you're in this dark night. Well, love works much the same way. If we don't love God's people, if we don't love God, if we don't love Jesus Christ, then the second coming doesn't mean very much to us.

[20:47] But if we love God, and we love His glory, and we love all of God's people, and we love Jesus Christ, then we are longing and waiting to see Him.

The final resurrection will be sweet because we love those people that are going to be there. And Christ coming back will be sweet and wonderful because we love Him and want to see Him. And so, Paul is saying, guard that love. Keep the love burning. And if it does, it will protect you. You won't grow cold. You won't become distracted. And hope is the final piece of the armor that we should keep on, we should keep using.

What is hope? Hope is a confident expectation of future good. Hope is the idea that my best things are still ahead.

What I'm enjoying right now, whether good or whether bad, my best things are still to come. They're going to be eclipsed. They're going to be put into the shade by something that is so grand.

[21:54] And that is what hope is. Well, what's going to keep me from falling asleep while I'm on guard duty? What's going to keep me from falling asleep while I'm watching?

Hope will. Hope will. Hope will keep you looking to the horizon, waiting for the dawn to come. If that is stirring in your heart, then you will stay awake.

And you won't lose heart in the final darkness. It becomes the hardest to watch when you've been watching for a long, long time.

And I don't know if it's true or not, but they say it's darkest right before the dawn. And that's how it will be for Christ and His coming. We will be, it will be a long time.

And we will be tired of watching. And what is going to keep us from falling asleep and losing our faith altogether? Well, hope will. God will give us hope to keep hoping for Christ's coming.

[23:00] He is bringing the day with Him. He is coming with the light. And so this dreadful night, it will end. And this darkness will be over. And Jesus will save me completely then.

And so hope protects us against loving this world and loving the darkness. Well, how do you prepare for the second coming of Christ? You cultivate these things then.

You cultivate love and faith and hope. You keep them on. You keep living out of them. Well, let me ask you, how are you going to strengthen your faith this week?

How are you going to strengthen your love this week? Will you read your Bibles? Will you talk to a brother and sister?

Will you pray for more faith and hope and love? If you want to stand until the end, you have to be serious about keeping your armor polished and bright and ready for action.

[23:59] How do you prepare for the second coming of Christ? Third, you rest in the gospel. You rest in the gospel.

Verse 9, it begins with the word for. For. And it goes back to verse 8 where it says, let us be self-controlled. Let us be sober-minded.

So why are we to keep watching? For. God. Did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. So how can we stay sober-minded?

How can we keep wearing our armor? We do that by resting in God's grace for us. He did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation.

So it's God's settled determination to save us, to give us salvation. He hasn't appointed us to wrath.

[25:01] We deserve wrath. That's what we've earned. But He's saying, I've not appointed you to that. I've appointed you instead to salvation.

Well, how is that possible? How can God just go about doing that? On what grounds can He appoint me to salvation when I know I'm a sinner?

Well, He finishes it. Only through our Lord Jesus is that possible. Only through the Lord Jesus Christ. So what does the gospel have to do with the second coming of Christ?

It has everything to do with it. What does preparing for the second coming have to do with the gospel? It has everything to do with it. The gospel is the foundation that we rest on as we wait.

We have hope for that day. We have hope. We expect good things. Why? Because God has appointed us to salvation because Jesus Christ has died for us. He's sovereignly decided to give us mercy.

[26:05] It is His appointment. It isn't our decision. And so our hope isn't resting on the fact that I can gut this out. I can make it through the night because I can do it.

I'm strong enough. And if I just keep trying harder, then I will make it. That's not what our hope rests on, my ability to do that. It rests on that God has appointed me to this.

And if He has appointed me to it, then heaven and earth will fade away, will fall apart before I can slip out of His hand, before my hope will fail.

So our hope is not resting on my power. It's resting on who God is.

Can anyone take one of His children away from Him? Can any of His children slip out of His hand?

Well, God is too great for that. He's too great to let that happen.

[27:07] Our Lord is never taxed. He's never tired. He never almost loses control of things.

Satan rages and the world revolts. And what is God's response? He laughs. Our God effortlessly keeps trillions and trillions of electrons spinning in your body all the time.

and He keeps the stars spinning in their courses blindfolded in with His left hand. He's not taxed at all.

And so it is no big thing for Him to hold you until that day. Our hope doesn't rest in our plan and our power but in His sovereign, omnipotent strength.

And so when He appoints you brother or sister to life, you will have life. The universe will disintegrate and the stars will crash into the earth before you lose your hope.

[28:14] And so brothers and sisters, hope. Keep hoping. Are you growing tired of waiting? Then think about who your God is and hope.

Look to Him and keep hoping. Well, it's more than God's sovereignty. sovereignty. It's more than God's sovereignty that we can rest our hope in. It's the fact that Christ has loved us and He has died for us.

You see that next. He died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. Our hope rests not on ourselves but in Christ and His death for us.

So why Jesus? Why did you die for me? So that you could be with me. That's why He died.

So that He could have me with Him. On His last night, Jesus prayed, Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and see my glory.

[29:21] Jesus longs to have His people with Him and so He prays. He prays for that and then He goes a step further.

How can God the Father answer that prayer? I'm a sinner. I can't be with Jesus because He's perfect and I'm not. So how can God answer that prayer?

Well, Jesus goes to the next step and He dies for me and for my sin. He dies with my sin, your sin, if you are a believer, on Him.

And He takes it into the grave and He leaves it there. His blood covers it all. And so He does that so that we can be with Him.

on that day. So the strength that we have to live for the second coming, it is flowing from the cross. It flows from the purpose of the cross.

[30:24] Why did Jesus die? To have me with Him. And so if Jesus died to have me with Him, then Jesus is not going to be denied. He is going to have what He died for. And so we can rest in that.

We can depend on Jesus' purpose for us and what He has done for us. We can depend on His love and we can wait when it's dark. We can wait because Jesus has died for us.

And we can keep watching when everyone else has fallen asleep because Jesus gave up everything He had to have us, to get us. So how do you prepare for the second coming?

You rest in this gospel. You think about it. You dwell in it. You live in it. You rest in the gospel of free, omnipotent, sovereign grace.

Fourth, how do you prepare for the second coming of Christ? You encourage one another and build each other up. Verse 11, therefore, encourage one another and build each other up just as in fact you are doing.

[31:27] Remember last week we talked about a soldier on guard duty in the Arden Forest in December 1944. And so that soldier is in the middle of World War II.

He's on the front line and he's growing homesick and he's losing hope. Well, what would happen to that soldier if he fell asleep while he was supposed to be watching?

Well, he would be in a lot of trouble a lot of trouble. The penalty for falling asleep on guard duty in the middle of a war zone is death.

You could be executed by the army. This soldier has a more immediate problem. In the middle of December 1944 the Arden Forest the Germans are launching their last ditch effort to end the war in their own terms.

And so we call it the Battle of the Bulge and the Germans called it Operation Watch on the Rhine. And if you fell asleep and you quit watching while you were there you were going to die because all the Germans were going to come crashing down on your physician and your whole unit would be obliterated too.

[32 : 47] So what is that bone tired weary sleepy century need in the middle of a frozen December night in the middle of the woods?

He needs a friend to come and encourage him to say stay awake. You need to stay awake. Everything is depending on the fact of you staying awake.

And Paul knows how it is for Christians. The night is long and we grow tired and what we need is encouragement to keep living for the day to keep looking forward to the coming of Christ.

So who is going to do that work of encouragement? Is the world going to encourage you? No. Is Satan going to come up beside you and encourage you to stay awake?

No. It has to be the body of believers. Everyone. Everyone. Encourage one another.

[33 : 53] So this encouragement about the second coming of Christ this encouragement about living as sons of the day and sons of the light and resting in the gospel it should be flowing from member to member from one person in the body to another person.

So older women do you think that the younger women need encouragement to keep living for the day? You know they do.

You remember what it was like to have a husband busy and lots of children busy and a messy house and bills to pay and errands to run and it's so easy to become distracted to quit living for the things that you're supposed to be living for.

It's easy to quit watching and start living for this world. Well who is going to help them? Older ladies you are. You know what it's like.

You have been there. And so you sit down with them. You sit down beside them. You can sympathize with them. You can encourage them. You can show them the beauty of the gospel in their situation in a way that I cannot in a way that no man can in no way that even a younger lady could.

[35 : 11] They need you. So older men do you think that the younger men need this encouragement? You know it's so. You know it's easy to fall asleep at the wheel don't you?

To forget about what we're to be about. Well who can help that younger man stay awake and keep pressing on through all the things that he has to do?

You can. Sometimes a young private needs a grisly old sergeant to poke and prod and to kick and yell and do whatever it takes to keep that young private about his business.

And that's how a sergeant keeps a private alive in the middle of a war. So will you do that for the younger men?

They need you to. So college and career keep encouraging one another to live for the coming of Christ. That day is going to put everything in the shade.

[36 : 19] Your jobs and your romances and your school is all going to be put in the shadows and so what do you do? You live as a child of the day. You are sons and daughters of the light so live like it and keep reminding each other about these things.

Moms and dads, do you think your Christian teenager needs to be encouraged to keep pressing on and waiting? You know they do.

There's iPods and Playstations and there's classes and there's colleges to decide where to go and there's the popular crowd and there's sports and there's so many things to look at and so many things to be distracted by.

It's so easy for the world to hypnotize a young believing Christian into oblivion and to slumber and so would you keep them awake?

It's not easy. It's not going to be comfortable to talk to your teenagers sometimes about those things but they need you to. If you love them more than your own comfort you will do that for them.

[37 : 28] Well that kind of encouragement was going on in Thessalonica and I believe that it is going on in Grace Fellowship Church. I know that it is and so I say with Paul keep doing that.

Do it more and more. It's going to make all the difference in the world. This is God's means of preserving his people. He's not doing it by magic.

He's using your brothers and sisters. He's using you to keep them safe and so Christ is coming. coming. He is coming as surely as the Germans were coming that winter night in December 1944.

He is coming. So my unbelieving friend I want to talk to you again. My Christian brother and sister I want to talk to you.

Christ is coming. Will he find you prepared? Will you be foolish or will you be wise? when he comes it will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and they went out to meet the bridegroom and five of them were foolish and five of them were wise.

[38:43] The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them and the wise ones however took oil and jars along with their lamps and the bridegroom was a long time in coming.

And they all became drowsy and they fell asleep and at midnight the cry rang out. Here's the bridegroom. Come out to meet him.

Then all the bridesmaids woke up and they trimmed their lamps and the foolish ones said to the wise, give us some of your oil because we don't have any. No.

Go buy some. There might not be enough for both of us. Go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves. And while the foolish ones were away, the bridegroom arrived.

And the bridesmaids who were ready went out to meet him and they came and they went with him into the wedding banquet and the door was shut. And later the others also came.

[39:46] Sir, sir, can you open the door for us? And he replied, I tell you, I don't know you. I don't So will you be wise or will you be foolish?

Will you be prepared or will you be all unprepared? may