

PSALM 123 verse 1

I lift up my eyes to you, to you who sit enthroned in heaven.

² As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a female slave look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he shows us his mercy.

³ Have mercy on us, LORD, have mercy on us, for we have endured no end of contempt.

⁴ We have endured no end of ridicule from the arrogant, of contempt from the proud.

1 THESSALONIANS 5 verses 1 – 11

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

⁴ But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵ You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶ So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹ For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

“READY OR NOT, HERE I COME!”

READING: 1 Thessalonians 5 verses 1-11

Children seem to love playing hide and seek, especially in big old houses where there are so many places to hide. When I played it, I remember that the one doing the looking was "it" or "on it". "It" would close their eyes and count to 20 giving time for the others to hide. If you were nearby you could hear the counting all the way to 20. Then you would hear the cry, "Here I come, ready or not!" There were always 4 certainties in the game:

1. "It" was definitely coming
2. "It" was coming when they were good and ready and not before
3. "It" was coming whether you were ready or not
4. And If you were not ready, then you would pay the consequences.

Little did we realise as children, how much this game of hide and seek paralleled the return, The Second Coming, of Jesus Christ. Paul emphasised to the church at Thessalonica, and subsequently, to us today the importance of being ready. As we are about to enter the Advent Season again, when we recall the arrival of the Christ Child to Bethlehem and prepare for the return, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, we need to remind ourselves that this is one of the most repeated teachings in all of Scripture. Paul was well aware of Christ's return and he shared the truth of his return to the believers gathered in Thessalonica. As a matter of fact, Paul told them that he should not have to remind them about this fact again.

It is much like the story of a tourist driving through the West of Ireland who stopped at a petrol station. He saw a piece of rope dangling from a sign labelled "Weather Forecaster." The tourist was curious and asked the petrol pump attendant "How can you possibly tell the weather with a piece of rope?" "It's simple," came the answer. "When the rope swings back and forth, it's windy. When it gets wet, it's raining. When it's frozen stiff, and it has white stuff on it, well it is snowing, and when it's gone, storm!"

There are simply some things that should be obvious without even asking. The return of Jesus Christ is one of those things. The Scriptures inform us that the Messiah will return **"...as a thief in the night."** (verse 2). The question is not "If Jesus will return?" but "when he will return?" Paul answers this question with a very clear response, **"no one knows."** It is quite comical that people are forecasting the end of the world on a regular basis. I think that these past few years have seen more predictions than ever. A group of conspiratorial theorists stated that the effect of Planet Nubiru or Planet X was going to cataclysmic end to the earth in November 2019. That period has long since passed, and we are still here, although they have amended their thinking to state that the coronavirus is part of it. Religious groups and sects have also long "prophesied" specific dates for the "end of the world". Again, those dates have come and gone. I wonder if God finds this all amusing! I suppose, if they keep guessing, someone will get it right – by chance rather than judgement! Paul explains this by describing the time of Jesus return as "a thief in the night." Just as a thief plans his or her entry at a least expected moment, so it will be with the coming of the Jesus - Son of Man. Jesus himself proclaims this truth, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew: **"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only"** (Matthew 24 verse 35). Later in that same chapter Jesus shares this warning: **"Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him"** (Matthew 24 verse 44).

In our reading Paul continues with these words: **"When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness."** (1 Thessalonians 5 verses 3-5). Paul often refers to the Second Coming of Christ as the "Day of the Lord." Throughout scripture the "Day of the Lord" was the that time when God would pour out His wrath on the ungodly. After Jesus returns, He will begin to pour out His judgments upon them, in a time often referred to as the "Great Tribulation." The tragedy of this day is that so many will be unprepared, and not only will they be unprepared, but we are told they will actually be deceived. They will also be actively deceiving others as they proclaim we have "peace and safety." Many will be convinced that there is no danger when in fact destruction is at the doorstep, the end is near.

We must live daily with an attitude of readiness. God's word to us: **"So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep; sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night." (1 Thessalonians 5:6-7)**. Much as a soldier is commanded to "stay alert while on his post", so too, must we as Christians. Paul instructs us to watch, to stay wide awake, to be vigilant. The command is in the present tense which means this state of being vigilant must be a continual practice of the mature Christian. It is a matter of attitude. A Roman soldier would be put to death for falling asleep on his watch. The outcome could be just as fatal for those who are not constantly on alert. We as disciples must be disciplined in our walk. We are image bearers of the Lord and should be diligent in that calling. Disciples know who they are in Christ. Disciples seek to be conformed into the image of Christ. Paul is warning us that we must not allow anything to invade our lives that will be harmful to our moral alertness. Sin will affect one's ability to make moral and Spiritual decisions. If we do not control sin in our lives, we could soon be overcome by its effects, spiritually passing out and becoming oblivious to the workings of the evil one. We must live daily in the light and in obedience to God's word. We must be prepared with the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation (**verse 8**). We must be alert and prepared at all times.

During WWII there was a sailor who served on a small submarine chaser in the South Pacific. While on the ship, one of the strict commands was to always be combat ready. Which meant even when you were taking a shower you were to keep your gear nearby. Now, there were times when the crew would not see another ship or plane for weeks. And during those times they would become a little lax in their readiness. Then one morning the sailor and some of his shipmates were showering when the air-raid siren sounded and they were all called to immediately man their stations. The only problem, no clothes. As he came out of the shower, a helmet was slapped on his head and he had to run immediately to his post as an artillery loader with nothing on but a helmet. Can you imagine the look on the enemy pilot's face when they looked on the ship with naked men manning the guns? This sailor and his buddies found out quickly that not being ready had some pretty tough consequences.

Yet we are told there is a blessing when we walk in readiness. **"For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing. (1 Thessalonians 5:9-11)** There is a special spiritual peace in knowing that you are always ready always prepared for the Coming of Our Lord. If you are ready, you will have God's heart. A heart full of love and a spiritual yearning to serve others. The Scriptures are crystal clear. If you want to be great in the Kingdom of God you are to be a servant to all. (**Matthew 20 verse 26**). Jesus said I came to serve not to be served. (**Matthew 20 verse 28**). If you are ready, you will look for Christ's Coming with excitement and with expectancy.

Let me close with this true story: during one of his expeditions to the Antarctic, Sir Ernest Shackleton left some of his men on Elephant Island. He did this with the intent of returning for them and carrying them back to England. But he was delayed. By the time he could go back for them the sea had frozen and he had no access to the island. Three times he tried to reach them but was prevented by the ice. Finally, on his fourth attempt, he broke through and located a narrow channel. Much to his surprise, he found the crewmen waiting for him, supplies packed and ready to board. They were soon on their way back to England. He asked them how they knew to be ready for him. They told him they did not know when he would return, but they were sure that he would. So, every morning, the group's leader rolled up his bag, and packed his gear and told the crew to do the same. Every day instructing them, "Get your things ready, boys. The boss may come today."

Just as a thief plans his entry at an uncertain time, that is, when least expected, so it will be with the coming of the Son of Man, the return of Jesus Christ.

We should each day be prepared to leave this ship of life. We are Children of the living God. We are Children of the Light. We must be ready. We must be prepared. We must be vigilant .

19, 20 - Ready or Not - He Will Come.

THE KING IS COMING

THE MARKETPLACE IS EMPTY, NO MORE TRAFFIC IN THE STREETS

All the builders' tools are silent, no more time to harvest wheat
Busy housewives cease their labours
In the courtroom no debate
Work on earth is all suspended, as the King comes thro' the gate

*O the King is coming, the King is coming
I just heard the trumpets sounding
And now His face I see
O the King is coming, the King is coming
Praise God, He's coming for me*

Happy faces line the hallways, those whose lives have been redeemed
Broken homes that He has mended
Those from prison He has freed
Little children and the aged, hand in hand stand all aglow
Who were crippled, broken, ruined
Clad in garments white as snow

*O the King is coming, the King is coming
I just heard the trumpets sounding
And now His face I see
O the King is coming, the King is coming
Praise God, He's coming for me*

I can hear the chariots rumble, I can see the marching throng
The flurry of God's trumpets spells the end of sin and wrong
Regal robes are now unfolding
Heaven's grandstand's all in place
Heaven's choir now assembled start to sing "Amazing Grace"

*O the King is coming, the King is coming
I just heard the trumpets sounding
And now His face I see
O the King is coming, the King is coming
Praise God, He's coming for me*