
Judgement Day: What has God entrusted to you?

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Orange and red and brown and yellow leaves are animating the air. They color the ground and crunch under our feet. In the dying daylight hours and waning warmth, they can make that precious time outside we have right now so much more enjoyable. Ahhhh....the changing of the seasons.

Do you ever feel like the world is going to end? I don't know if that's the school fatigue or the pandemic speaking. All jokes aside, as we approach the end of the church year, how comfortable are we with the idea that the times and the seasons could change in the blink of an eye and Jesus could return to judge at any time? Are we awake and sober to this inevitability? Or, are we sleeping on it?

The first letter to the church in Thessalonica may be considered in some regards the most "authentic" book of the Bible. It is the oldest preserved Christian writing and a letter written to one of the first churches founded by Paul.

It shows us, some 2000 years later, that even in the earliest Christian communities the Christian life requires focus. The temptation to be lazy, apathetic, complacent with our situation is real.

Paul lays it out in overly simplistic terms, illustrating it as day and night. Awake and asleep. Alive and dead. And, it can be easy to let our sight fall short of what Paul is talking about in this passage and much of this letter, the day of the Lord, if we remain in this frame of thinking.

'You do not need to have anything written to you about when the day of the Lord will come,' Paul says.

No, Paul is not talking about Sunday when he says the day of the Lord. He's talking about the Day the Christ Jesus returns. Paul expresses some urgency here because he recognized the death and resurrection of Jesus marked a change in history, a change that puts us now living in the endtime.

I don't know about you, but I might disagree with Paul when he says we don't need to have anything written for us about the time when the Day of the Lord will come. But, God knows if we did have something written for us, we'd mark our calendars and procrastinate our work and scramble to submit our work at 11:59 p.m. but ultimately ask for an extension from our Teacher. The uncertainty of not knowing when Jesus will return to judge can definitely fill my worries and anxieties. But, how much more lifegiving can it be to let it fill our imagination? How creative can we be in our life work with God's impending glory?

Paul says, "Encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing"

Many of us have our minds fixated on the obvious dualistic tensions in our society today, and those members of our Christian family sleeping in what many of us see as the plain daylight. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians reminds us that even within the Christian community, we are called to build each other up. We are called to encourage one another. We live united in Christ.

Paul goes into detail about how to do this in the final 12 verses of this chapter that follow today's reading. In those exhortations, he says, "[...] be patient with all [the idlers, the fainthearted, the weak]. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

God doesn't set us up for rejection and wrath. God sets us up for joy. For salvation through Jesus.

Like in the Parable of the Talents, today's Gospel reading, we know not when God will return, but we know God will come with the expectation that we have invested and seen returns on what has been entrusted to us. Jesus will return with the expectation that we have not been sleeping. Jesus will return with the expectation that we have been awake and working with clarity of heart and mind.

Sure, clarity of heart and mind do not come easy in pandemic times, isolated times, stressful times, sad times, anxious times. But, wear faith and love and the hope of salvation, Paul says. Protect your heart with faith and love. Protect your mind with the hope of salvation.

What good is armor if we're wearing it while sleeping? Or, if I'm sitting around my home by myself wearing it, looking tough?

Faith and love and the hope of salvation will protect us as we engage in tough work *with* our brothers/sisters/siblings/Christian family, work that will see us encounter opposing and evil forces.

Let us wear faith and love and the hope of salvation while we work to encourage one another and build each other up, as we lift our eyes to the hills for our help from the maker of heaven and Earth, knowing the day of judgment will come to bring joy of God and the realization of salvation through Christ Jesus.

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