

The Shoemaker's Dream

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We talked about this two weeks ago. The Rapture, being caught up with the Lord, meeting him in the air. But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do, who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so will always be with the Lord. Therefore, encourage one another with these. Now, concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you.

For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying there is peace and security, then suddenly destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in the darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.

So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But since we

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belong to the day, let us be sober. Having put on the breastplate of faith and love and for helmet, the hope of salvation, for God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we might live with him. Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up.

Just as you are doing, Father. We're grateful for your word. We thank you, Father, that you revealed to us the coming again of your son, Jesus Christ. And thank you, Father. We can prepare ourselves to meet him one day in the air.

We pray that as we look at this passage that you'd give us understanding and not just to know about this event, but to be able to apply it to our lives. I would remember this young lady and her family that lost her husband. And I just pray, Father, you'd comfort them and meet their needs in the midst of this heartache that they're experiencing. Thank you again for your word. In Christ's name, Amen.

You may be seated. November is one of my favorite months of the year because I love Thanksgiving. I just look forward to that time when the relatives, some close, some far away, some haven't seen for a while, some have. We're going to get together and enjoy a meal together, and we catch up on each other's lives, what's going on, and kind of the encouragement of being around each other. And in some ways, I think Thanksgiving for me is just kind of like a reminder of the day of the Lord when it says we will meet the Lord in the air and will always be with the Lord.

I believe that will be a true day of thanksgiving when we all meet with the Lord in the air. Well, Paul has answered some questions concerning the dead in Christ in chapter four, and we looked at that two weeks ago. And now in chapter five, he anticipates some questions that he's going to answer to help us to really understand what this is going to be like. But before we look at the passage we're looking at today, I just want to summarize what we learned so far about the coming of the Lord and the Rapture. We saw that, first of all, it was visible.

He comes in the clouds of the sky. We saw that it was audible with a loud voice, with the trumpet sound of the Lord. And we believe that singular, the word coming, not comings. Okay, mentioned 16 times in the New Testament referring to the return of Jesus Christ. And so I'm going to get into that in chapter five.

But as I was studying this, I was struck by two verses and really started meditating on that. And those two verses are the end of chapter four, therefore encourage one another with these words. And Also in chapter 5, verse 11, therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. And so Paul is not giving us information so that we can know what's going to happen or when it's going to happen or any of those things. Those are important.

But the purpose is that we might be encouraging one another in the Lord. And so the more I thought about this, the more I thought, well, how does that encourage us? The fact that we know Christ is coming back one day? How is that going to encourage me when I'm sitting in the hospital dealing with trying to breathe or you maybe trying to figure out where you're going to go to work or how you're going to take care of this? Bill, how can the return of Christ encourage you?

And I, as we go through trials or problems, if I were to come to you in the midst of your problem, and I said, hey, be encouraged. Jesus is coming back. Now, that might be an encouragement. But I think, well, how's that helping me with my problem right now? I mean, he hasn't come back in 2,000 years, you know, and I'm not sure he's coming back today.

So how would that encourage me? So what does Paul mean when he tells us to encourage each other? And that's what I want to look at this morning. What does he mean when he tells us to encourage each other? Because Jesus Christ is coming again.

I mentioned that we saw the how Jesus is coming back in chapter four, and he's going to deal with some when questions in chapter five. That's a natural question. Everybody has, well, when's he coming back? And the church is just littered with shipwrecks of people that forecast that Jesus is coming back on a certain date and over and over and

over. And you think people would learn because Jesus said, nobody knows the hour or the day, and not even himself, but only the Father.

And so Paul explains in verse two of chapter five, he says, the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night for the world. It's going to be sudden, it's going to be unexpected, and it will be unavoidable. Sudden destruction will come upon them, and they will not escape. You and I that are believers, on the other hand, will hear that trumpet call.

We'll look up, and we'll be with the Lord forever. And we should not be surprised. He said, we won't know the day or the time, but we will be ready. And that's the message that Jesus gives over in Matthew 24 and chapter 25, when he talks about he's coming again. He wants us to be ready for his coming again.

And being ready means that you have to prepare. You can't just sit there and say, well, when it happens, it'll happen. Being ready means preparing for things. So the point Paul is emphasizing that we should be ready to meet the Lord in the air. And I just want to look a little bit at what does that mean for you and I?

What does it mean to be ready, ready? So with this in mind, I want to first of all point out an important word in the passage we looked at last week, and that's in verse 17 of chapter 4. It says, then we who are alive, who are left, will be Caught up. We saw that word. Caught up was the word we get rapture from together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

And so we will always be with the Lord. And the word I want you to see is that word meet. I mentioned Thanksgiving. I'm looking forward to meeting my kids that are coming home and grandkids coming home and cousins that are coming home. We're going to meet together.

This word is used four times in the Bible here over in Acts, chapter 28, verse 15, and Matthew, chapter 25, verse 1 and 6. And it was a specific word that was used when a general would go out and fight a battle against the enemy who wanted to destroy the city. When he won, he would come back to the city with his foes vanquished. The

people in the city would come out of the city to meet the general and celebrate, we won the war. We're not going into captivity and be slaves.

And then they would come back into the city with the general. And so they would go out to meet him and then come back with him to celebrate the victory. One example of this, Romans chapter 28. When Paul is on his way to Rome, it says, some Christians from Rome come out to the three taverns. They meet him and they go back into the city with him, referring to his second coming, Matthew chapter 25, which is all about being ready.

And the 10 virgins, remember, five had oil in their lamp and five did not. You turn over to Matthew 25. We find those five with the oil in their lamps in verse one. Then the kingdom of heaven will be like 10 virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. The call came.

Finally, the bridegroom is coming. They hear the call, they go out to meet him. Then in verse six. But at midnight there was a cry, here is the bridegroom, come out to meet him. And so they go out to meet him.

And then it says they went to the marriage feast with him. The five that had oil in their lamps, indicating that they were ready. Five were not ready, and they were shut out. And so the point is, when Christ comes again, we will meet him in the air, as we saw in chapter four. But we will come back with him to celebrate his victory over sin and Satan and all the things that are destroying our world.

It'd be like my son in Anchorage, and he's going to come for Thanksgiving. He said, I'm going to meet you for Thanksgiving and can you pick me up at the airport? So I would drive to the airport to pick him up to meet him, and then we would come back to my home together. And that's essentially what that word meet means, that when Christ comes, we will come back to this world with him as he brings judgment on those that'll be the day of the Lord, on those who had not received him, as Christ will celebrate his victory. And so he wants us to realize that we have to be ready.

That's the whole point of him talking about this. In Matthew, chapter 24, 25, Mark 13, Luke 17, 1 Corinthians 15, Revelation, you and I are to be preparing ourselves to meet the Lord. Paul used that illustration, a thief in the night. Anyone here ever had a thief come into your home and burglarize something? If you have, raise your hand.

I think several of us have. And of course they sent you a note that afternoon, right? And said, hey, I'll be by your house tonight at 2:00. You know, just so you know, if you want to stay awake, you know, keep me out of the house, you can. But it doesn't work that way, does it?

A thief doesn't announce when they're going to break into their house. And so that leaves us with the dilemma. Does that mean I'm supposed to be sitting in my house looking out the window all the time, worried that the thief is going to come? Well, how many of us could do that? We couldn't.

We couldn't live. But we are to be ready. It says so. In what way? No, it means I take precautions to protect myself and protect my home.

It might mean I lock my doors, I have security lights, I have some kind of system that would alert me to a thief coming in. We go about living our lives the way we normally would, but we take precautions to make sure that we're not going to be taken advantage of by this thief and in this sense that we're not going to not be ready when Christ comes back. And so Paul explains basically how we do this. In chapter five, verse eight, he says, but since we belong to the day, and if you're a believer, if you're a Christian, symbolizes you as belonging to the day. You're in the light, you see things.

If you belong to the day. He said, let us, let us be sober. And the word is self controlled. You and I need to live self controlled lives so that we do not miss the coming of the Lord. So we'll be ready when he comes, sober, self controlled, dressed and ready to go at any minute.

He says, but since we belong to the day, let Us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love and for helmet, the hope of salvation. And essentially he's saying, you need get up in the morning, get dressed, be ready for the day, because you don't

know what's going to happen. Now, I know no one here ever does this. They get up in the morning, they leave their pajamas on all day, Right? Okay.

Well, if you do enjoy it, but you're not ready, okay. For the things that may happen that day, if someone comes and says, let's go, well, I can't go. I'm in my pajamas. You get dressed. And here he talks about putting on the breastplate of faith and love and for helmet, the hope of salvation.

Jesus basically explains what this means over in Revelation, chapter 16, verse 15. And he says there, behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake keeping his garments on that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed. It's the idea of being dressed ready for service. It means I am spiritually dressed ready for the day that God has put before me.

It means getting up in the morning and reading my Bible and doing my devotions and getting prepared. It means, as I go through the day, just reminded that the day could be the day, and I'm supposed to be ready for that. If you go back to the five wise virgins, it meant that they had oil in their lamp. They were prepared. They didn't know when the bridegroom would come.

As it was, he came in the middle of the night, but because they had oil, they were ready. The five that didn't have the oil, they had to run about trying to get ready, and they were too late. And it says that they were locked out. And essentially a person is ready because they're doing what the Lord Jesus Christ has asked them to do for that day, they're prepared. As I thought about this, I was reminded of a play we did here in this church about 25 years ago, and it was based on Leo Tolstoy's story the Shoemaker's Dream.

Anyone read that? The Shoemaker's Dream. Wonderful story. And in this story, Martin is a wise and kind shoemaker, and he loves the Lord. He works hard all day, honest.

In the day, he's getting ready for bed, he lays down and Jesus appears to him in a dream and says, martin, I'm going to come and visit you tomorrow. Get ready. He wakes up excited. The next day, Jesus is going to come and visit me. I'm going to get

ready.

Well, he has to go about his work. But as he's doing his work, he's kind of looking out the window to see, is Jesus coming today? When's he coming? And he waits. And while he's looking out the window, he sees this old soldier walk by, just kind of broken and decrepit.

And he looks cold and hungry, and he feels compassion on him. And he goes out and says, hey, come on in here and warm up a little bit, and I'll give you something hot to drink. And the soldier comes in, he does that, and he's thankful, and he goes his way. And a little later in the day, Martin looks out the window and he sees this woman walking by holding a baby with no coat or shawl, and it's cold out. And he walks out and said, why don't you have a coat?

And she says, well, I had to sell it yesterday in order to have food for my child. He said, well, come on in, and brings her in and gives her something to eat. And then he hands her his coat to keep her warm. Later, he's waiting and waiting and waiting. Christ hasn't come yet.

Later, he sees this is the next guy he saw there. I've got that here somewhere. Oh. He sees a young boy that's stealing an apple from a vendor. And just as he grabs the apple, she grabs him and she starts hollering, I'm going to turn you into the police, and you're going to be arrested.

So he rushes out and he says, I'll pay for the apple. I'll pay for the apple. He invites the boy in and he talks to him and finds out he's really needy. But he gets him to promise that he would not steal any more apples. Well, the day comes to a close.

He finishes his work. He finally goes to bed, and he is disappointed because Jesus did not come and visit that day. He laid his pillow, his head on his pillow. And the Lord spoke to him, martin, I did come today. I did come today.

That was me, that old soldier, that young mother, that young boy. And he said, when you took care of them, you took care of me. That's exactly what Matthew 25 says, the

parable of the sheets and the goats. And it's talking about being ready for the return of Christ. It's not so much Israel this or that, or it's, will you be ready?

And he says in Matthew 25, it says, when the Son of man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations. And he will separate people, not nations, but people one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he'll place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the king will say to those on his right, come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me in. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me.

I was in prison and you came to me. And the righteous will answer him, saying, lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison or visit you? And the King will answer them, truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it for me.

And so how do we encourage each other with the coming of the Lord Christ likely could come back in our lifetime. Depends how old you are, I guess. Or young. But he may not. He hasn't yet.

He is coming. But there is a sense that Christ comes to us each day in one way or another. And how we handle those situations in our life show us whether we are ready to meet him or not. If we're not doing the work of the Lord now, don't think that, oh, I will someday. It just naturally happened.

No, we work at getting ready and we do that. We do our work. You can't be looking out the window all the time for the thief. But you take precautions. You do what you can to prepare yourself to serve Christ.

And that's usually done by serving others. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which he has prepared for us in advance. I had a wonderful example of that while I was in the hospital the first night and not able to sleep and struggling to get my breath. And my phone rang and about 9:00 at night, and I thought, who could be calling me now? And it has Seattle number.

So I answered it and it was Eddie from Albania, Eddie Dumos, who we support. He's got a big ministry over there. And he said, brother Jim, I heard you were in the hospital. I'm going. I just got here today.

How'd you hear that? In Albania. Okay. Well, he had somehow. And he said, brother, I just want to call and say we love you and can I pray for you.

And I said, yeah, you can pray for me. And prayed a wonderful prayer that God would give me a good night's rest and raise me up and start to recover. And simple thing maybe took three minutes to make a phone call to encourage me when I was going through sickness. And however God worked that out, I don't know. But he was sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit to do the work that God had given him to do.

And one of that is to pray for one another. And so the point being, if we're going to be ready for Christ to come back, we need to be prepared to do the work that he's given you to do. You still got to live life. You can't stop and look out the window all the time. Maybe he's coming today or get up on the rooftop or whatever people do.

No, you live life, but in the back of your mind, you're prepared. It's kind of like having your bags packed. All right, if it's today, okay, I'm ready. Let's go. And you don't have time to go shopping for bags when he comes back.

That has to be taken care of in advance. And so what I believe that God Paul is telling us here is we need to be encouraging each other to draw near to the Lord and to do the work that he's called to do us, even when we're going through difficult circumstances and times or easy times or whatever it is. And. And the fact is, when we go through things, a word of encouragement can be the thing that helps that person over the hump and get through that trial, faithful for the Lord. And so that's why he

says, therefore, encourage one another.

Yes, Jesus is coming back. And when he does, we'll be with him in the air. But until then, in a sense, he's coming back every day because through other people who he wants us to minister to. And so when we wake up in the morning, and most of us do when we wake up in the morning, let's put our spiritual clothes on. Let's close ourselves with that breastplate of righteousness, that salvation of hope.

And we do that by being in God's word, taking some time to read a passage or to have a devotional book that you read. And it's just like you're putting your clothes on, your spiritual clothes. I'm getting ready for the day. And then as you go through the day, you're just reminded that I'm not here just for myself. I'm an ambassador for Christ to represent him.

And God. If there's some way that I can minister to someone else in your name, help me to recognize that and to act on that. And if we're doing that, I guarantee you, when that trumpet sounds, you'll be ready. You'll be ready. Let's pray.