

Last Judgment Sunday
November 8, 2020
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Saved From Wrath by Christ

Dear Friends in Christ,

We have entered the end of the church year. In just three weeks we will begin Advent and then Christmas! But before we get to that joyful and exciting time of the Christian church year, we consider the last things. Next week we turn our attention to eternal life and the victory Christ will give to believers as the saints triumphant. Today we look into the future to the very last day of this earth, judgment day.

Election day in the United States is a bit like Judgment Day. Both have unknowns which makes people nervous and anxious and worried. But the unknowns are different. We knew the date of the election. We just did not know the results and may not know the final result for some time. But we do not know the date of Judgment Day. Instead we know the results. Through the apostle Paul, the Lord tells us today that we are saved from wrath by Christ. Judgment Day will not result in us suffering God's wrath. It will result in our salvation. Because we are saved from wrath by Christ, the Day of the Lord will not surprise us even though we don't know when it will happen. And while we wait for that great day, faith, hope and love will protect us.

The Day of the Lord Will Not Surprise Us

Now, brothers, 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 labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.

The most important part of planning a surprise party is making sure the guest of honor does not know that a party is being planned. The Lord is no good at planning surprise parties. He tells us in 1 Thessalonians and many other places that Judgment Day, the day of the Lord, is going to happen. The surprise is not that it is going to happen. The surprise is only the timing.

The sin darkened world knows in general that there will be a time when each person will have to answer to God. But instead of believe in Christ who saves us from God's wrath, the world hides in the dark and pretends everything is fine. The unbelieving world is like a pregnant woman who pretends like she is not pregnant and thus believes she will not have to go through the pain of childbirth. The world proclaims, "Peace and safety" so it does not have to consider the day of judgment that will certainly come.

Why don't you need to fear that day? Why don't you need to pretend that Judgment Day will never come? It is true that we have earned God's anger and punishment because of our sins. But it is also true that Christ has died for us so that we will not suffer wrath but instead receive salvation. The day of the Lord is like a good friend who lives across the country coming to visit. We don't know when they will arrive but they will call us when they get to town. Therefore, we eager await their arrival. The unknown time does not concern us. We know it will be a joyous reunion. So it will be when Christ appears in the clouds and we stand before him on Judgment Day. For then we will live with him forever.

Faith, Hope and Love Protect Us

Paul now reminds us that we can't stop living on this earth while we await that glorious reunion. While we live in eager expectation of Christ's return, the world and our own sinful nature will try to make our faith and minds dull so that we miss the joy of the day of the Lord. But we have faith, hope and love to protect us until that day.

You are all sons of the light and sons 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 alert and self-controlled. 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 self-controlled, 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.

The world will not just let us go easily on our way to eternal life through Christ. It will attack to try and make us fall asleep or get drunk. We have been saved from wrath by Christ and now the world tells us to take it easy. Once you've been baptized, just forget about growing in your faith. Once you've been confirmed, you don't need to stay awake in the Word. Once you've become a church member, you don't need to be alert by regularly receiving the Lord's Supper. The world and our sinful nature want to lull us into a spiritual sleep even after we have been given faith in Christ.

The way of the world is the path of least resistance. One could live a comfortable life by going along with the sins of society. One could be comfortable by going along with our own sin. Why struggle and fight to be alert and awake? Just take it easy. Go with the flow of sin and life will be easy. Too often we have fallen for this deceptive lullaby.

When the world and our own sinful nature do not succeed in making us sleep, they try to make us drunk. Some literally turn to the bottle to make guilt and sorrows go away for a while. Others will get drunk on political coverage. I admit, the election has been interesting but a politician or political party is not going to make any difference in where you spend eternity. Some get drunk on money as if money and wealth will make you happy and safe forever. Some get drunk on entertainment to drown out the trouble of the day and the guilt in the heart.

Paul tells us that we do not need to go about life in a spiritual stupor. *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.*

Faith, hope and love protect us and keep us awake and alert as we await Judgment Day. Paul puts faith and love together as the breastplate of our armor. The ancient soldier with this armor could be wounded in the arms or legs. However, his heart, lungs and vital organs are protected by the breastplate. So also, faith in Christ protects us from the lies of the devil, the world and our sinful nature. We may be wounded by sin and temptation but it will not kill us since we are protected by faith in Jesus. Christ himself took all the punishment for sins. He died for us so that we will live together with him. The love of Christ protects us from the flaming arrows of the devil.

So we put on this armor every day. Being confident that Christ has secured our salvation, we go into our workplaces, schools, homes, cities and nation to show the love of Christ. When you know that the Lord has forgiven you and will bring you into heaven on the day of the Lord, you

can show love to the neighbor who has different political views. You can show the love of Christ to the coworker who has different moral values. You can show love to the classmate who doesn't know anything about Jesus. We can show the love of Christ to a world that is still in the darkness.

As we do so, we also have the hope of salvation as our helmet. This helmet protects another of our vital organs. The world lies and distorts the message about Christ telling us that Jesus was just another man who died. The world tries to take away our hope and our certainty. But Christ has been raised from the dead. His resurrection gives us a certain hope for our resurrection to eternal life. The devil throws accusations of sin at us. If these sins counted against us, we would no longer have a certain hope of salvation. But Christ was raised to life for our justification. Because Jesus lives, our sins do not count against us.

Faith, hope and love protect us as we wait for Christ to return. Put these on by daily devotions and Bible reading and by regularly receiving Holy Communion. These are gifts of God's grace to us. While these are individual gifts to each believer, it is important to know that God has brought us into his Holy Christian Church, into the communion of saints. When the forces of evil in this world are dragging us down and trying to put us to sleep spiritually, it is time to be around our fellow saints. We bring the gospel to each other to build up faith, hope and love in each other.

No one knows when the day of the Lord will happen. But it will be a wonderful day for all who believe. Until then, we do what Paul tells us to do. *Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

Amen.