**1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (ESV)**

**1** Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. **2** For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. **3** While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. **4** But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. **5** For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. **6** So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. **7** For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. **8** But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. **9** For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, **10**  who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. **11** Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

**“The Day Is Dawning”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Creation bears down upon us at this time of the year. The freedom felt during spring and summer are no more. The days are getting shorter. The light is fading. There are still 24 hours in a day, but the days are not the same. Changes in creation with light and darkness affect our life. It is a deep reminder of the end times, the Last Day that draws near. Where wars between sinful men rise and fall over the ages. God alone will bring conclusion to His creation. Christian writer J.R. Tolken reflects such a coming Day in his book, “The Lord of The Rings.” Frodo the ring bearer states, "I wish it need not have happened in my time," "So do I," says Gandalf, "and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."[[1]](#footnote-1)

Having to deal with the times before the Last Day was a question among the congregation in Thessalonica. This booming city of 200,000 people was a major capitol for the Romans in Macedonia. Much like our society, the saturation of cultures, information, trade, and all matters of life were overwhelming for these Christians. As busy as it was, St. Paul brought it all to a halt with the Word of God. Nothing would stand in the way of Christ’s return. The glorified savior revealed that the sun was setting upon a world of sin. Yet, a new day was also dawning by the promise of God’s Son. What joy is the Last Day for it leaves us with no one else other than Jesus.

As with light now fading, the darkness means everything is ripe for judgment by Christ. The Thessalonians could see this wrath of God upon the Roman world. They were afraid, but human calculations would not bring comfort. Times and seasons came out of a fallen creation. Let alone, they would lead away from Christ to worship creation. St. Paul gave a better revelation saying, “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 sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.  But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.” Rather than concern for when or how, it was to take seriously the words of Jesus. They had no need for anything else. God already gave them what would save them on the Day of Judgment.

In our time, there is plenty of attention to the Last Day. The impending darkness appears evident to many people. It is what leads to blockbuster movies like 2012 playing off predictions made by the Mayan calendar. It is what leads people to follow a false preacher like Harold Camping even when he gets the dates wrong repeatedly. Judgment is what we fear when hearing the Prophet Zephaniah say, “The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there.” Yet, is such judgment as surprising at it sounds? Those baptized into Christ had a baptism into His death. He bore the darkness of the world and the curse of the Law. God’s Son is the mighty man who cried upon the cross! All this comes from the Word that surprisingly gives us Jesus as Savior. He says in Revelation, “Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you (3:3).”

As with light now dawning, the darkness is fading away to what arises in Christ. Rather than despair consuming them over the final judgment of the world and its darkness. The Thessalonians were to find themselves fit for confessing the Gospel. St. Paul said, “But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.” This is the justifying faith in Jesus as Savior. It is the love for neighbor by sacrifice. It is the hope of an unfailing certainty that God is faithful to His Word. St. Paul describes it all as armor because before the Last Day it is a battle against the darkness. He writes in Ephesians, “Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm (6:13).” Rather than our design, God has designed what we need for salvation. A protection that makes every sinner righteous by faith in Jesus with confidence to battle for what shines is the Gospel.

The light of Christ is rising even when the times are growing darker. Rather than seeing dusk, it is the dawn of the Last Day. How much the world wants to turn us to laziness with sin. How much the devil wants us to worship works all in the Name of God. How much our sinful flesh fails to fight. Our Lutheran Fathers in their dark hours trusted more in Christ and His Last Day than what they could do. They wore the armor of God by Word and Sacraments. It allowed them to reject those who taught there was no eternal judgment and others who wanted a worldly kingdom (Tappert 38:4-5). Whatever we invest in the Gospel comes already from what God invests of His life for our salvation. St. Paul said, “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.” Faith alone trusts in His Word, love flows out to our neighbor by His Word and hope knows His Word saves on the Last Day. It is armor fit for every person, a baptism shining with the rising of the Son. This righteousness of Christ is from the Word that not only created the world, but also has overcome it with the hope of God’s love by the cross.

Since the Last Day leaves us with Jesus, we share in this joy as the baptized. St. Paul concludes saying, “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” It is far from giving a warm fuzzy and not a cold prickly. It is different from a peppy business motto to rally the employees. This encouragement clings to Scripture where alone we find Christ. Not a pat on the back, but a speaking of forgiveness, a prayerful hope together for life and a promising gift only the Lord gives. Likewise, we build one another up not by our plans of glory, but in what God has already planned for us by the glory of His Son. It is a foundation laid upon the cross, love living in sacrifice for others and hope in the Last Day as a God alone brings victory to His creation. There will always be a need to celebrate Veterans Day until the Day of the Lord. At that time Luther states, “It comes in order to set free from their sins all who desire it, and you too long to be thus free. Give thanks to God and continue in that opinion. Christ says that his coming is your redemption” (Day by Day We Magnify You 415). Rather than dusk, it is the dawning of day that we see coming in Christ. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.

1. http://www.allgreatquotes.com/lord\_of\_the\_rings\_fellowship\_of\_the\_ring\_quotes.shtml [↑](#footnote-ref-1)