

Even if we have not seen it in real life, we have all seen the cartoon of the bearded man in a robe and sandals, standing on the street corner with his sign that says, "The end is near!" While that message is Biblical and true, it is probably not the best way to convey the message that Christ is coming again, and that time may be sooner than we like to think. Judgment Day, or the end of the world, is a topic that we may find interesting, but we do not really want to think about for ourselves. While we might be fascinated with learning about it, we might also be frightened at the thought of it actually happening. This morning, as we are observing the second Sunday of End Times season, we do want to take a closer look at Judgment Day, the day of Christ's return at the end of time. The Apostle Paul focuses our attention by reminding us, "Living for the Day Leads to Living in the Day!"

I would think that most of us realize that we do not know exactly when the last day is going to come. That day will come suddenly, as Paul says, "**Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 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.**" (1-3) Since we do not know when Jesus is going to return, He wants us to be ready for it all of the time. Once it happens, there is no time to prepare for it.

On that Last Day, Jesus is going to return on the clouds of heaven with all of His heavenly glory. At His ascension, the angels told the disciples that we would see Him return, just as they saw Him go into heaven. The big difference will be that we will get to see Him as Paul wrote to the Philippians: "*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*" (Philippians 2:9-11) On that day, no one will be able to deny Who Jesus is, for He will appear on His heavenly throne.

When Jesus returns, all people, those alive at the time, as well as those who have died, will stand before Him. Paul had written this in the previous chapter: "*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.*" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

When the end comes, each of us must stand before Jesus' majestic throne, and He will pass judgment on all of us. This is the prospect of that day which may bring dread or terror to our hearts. God knows and sees all. What I may be able to keep hidden from others, I cannot conceal from God. God not only sees everything that I do, but He also judges the thoughts and attitudes of my heart. So the idea of having to stand before Him for judgment is terrifying because there is no way that I am ever going to be able to "get away" with any of the sins which I have committed in thoughts and words, as well as actions.

Still, Judgment Day is not something which we need to fear and dread because there have been a few other days that have also taken place for us. We remember the day of His birth, as God became man to live on this earth as one of us, to be under the same demands of the law which we are under, so that He might keep those demands of the law for us. We also remember the day of His death, as Jesus was declared guilty of all of our sins, and then suffered the punishment for each one of them as He endured the agony of hell itself as He hung on that cross for us. Then there is the day of His resurrection, as God placed His stamp of approval on all the work which Jesus was sent to this earth to do for us. Finally, there is the day of our baptism when God the Holy Spirit created faith within our heart and declared us to be one of God's holy children and heir of all the blessings which Jesus came to win for us. Paul writes, "**God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.**" (9-10) So there is nothing that needs to frighten us about the Last Day. On that day, He will simply announce for all to hear that each one of us is His holy child, declared sinless through His blood. That means we can look forward to that day as we live for that day because we know what awaits us.

So now what? As we live for that day of Jesus' return, we are going to live in the present day, being who God has made us to be, which is children of the light. But what does that mean — how do we live as children of the Day? Paul explains, **“You, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.”** (4–6)

To live in the day is to be aware of the darkness which wants to overtake us. By darkness, Paul is referring to sin and unbelief, which blind us to the truth of God's love. Many times in the Bible, darkness is equated with living without the light of God's Word to guide us to the actions which are pleasing in His sight. Those who live under the cover of darkness, trying to hide their evil deeds, usually slip up somewhere along the line and get caught and punished for their evil deeds. Paul is encouraging us not to live our lives like that — engaged in the evil deeds of darkness which the world loves so much. The sinful world wants us to join them in their evil deeds of darkness, so we need to beware lest we be drawn in to their sinful actions and ways of thinking. Since it seems that the last day is being delayed, we may be tempted to let our guard down and begin to act like those in darkness of sin.

What we need is the light of God's Word to reveal to us what His holy and perfect will is for us through this life. That is why the Lord knew it was so important for us to be in His Word — at home and at church with our fellow believers. We need to be on our guard against apathy and complacency. Rather, He wants us always to be vigilant — alert and self-controlled, living in the Day as we wait for the Day to arrive.

What can we do to help us remain alert and self-controlled? Paul tells us, **“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.”** (8) Paul says we need to make use of the equipment which God has given to us. Faith is the confidence that God will do everything that He has promised to us — making us His dearly loved children and will bring us safely into His heavenly kingdom. Love is faith being put into action, living each day as an expression of thanks to God for all that He has done for us. Hope of salvation is what sustains our faith and love and encourages them to grow. Without the certain hope that we will be raised from death to live eternally with Him in His kingdom, our faith would be meaningless. This armor which God has given to us surrounds us with His strength so that we can take our stand against the powers of darkness. It also clothes us with the Lord Jesus so that we do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful flesh. God's armor supplies the strength we need to live in the day as His children. With these gifts from God, we have a continual source of recharging whenever we might begin to feel burned out spiritually.

So Paul concludes, **“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”** (11) We do this whenever we gather together as brothers and sisters in the faith. God has given us fellow Christians in the home, and in the Church. The days can be difficult for the Christian in this life and the glories of heaven may seem quite distant. How good it is when the Lord gives us people to encourage us in that fight against our sinful nature and the temptations of this world. We build each other up when we use the Means of Grace with one another as we are privileged to do in worship, in Bible study, and Sunday school. What a special blessing to know that although our struggles in this life may be different, our source of strength is the same and we are looking forward to the same destination.

Why do we live in the Day? Because we are living for the Day — the Day when our Savior will return to take us to live with Him forever. We live for the Day, confident of what our Savior has waiting for us. Meanwhile we live in the Day, being what our Savior has made us.