

CITYWEST CHURCH

15.03.2026 - 10 AM

LIVING IN THE REALITY OF CHRIST'S RETURN.

Now concerning how and when all this will happen, dear brothers and sisters,^[a] we don't really need to write you. 2 For you know quite well that the day of the Lord's return will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. 3 When people are saying, "Everything is peaceful and secure," then disaster will fall on them as suddenly as a pregnant woman's labor pains begin. And there will be no escape.

4 But you aren't in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won't be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief.^[b] 5 For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don't belong to darkness and night. 6 So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded. 7 Night is the time when people sleep and drinkers get drunk. 8 But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation.

9 For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. 10 Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. 11 So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (NLT)

One of the central hopes of the early church was the return of Jesus.

The Thessalonian believers lived with a strong expectation that Christ would return. But with that expectation came questions.

When will it happen? How will it happen?

What should we do while we wait?

Paul's answer is surprisingly practical.

He does not tell them to speculate about dates. He does not encourage them to obsess over timelines.

Instead he tells them how to live.

Because for Paul, the return of Christ is not primarily about predicting the future.

It is about shaping the present.

Followers of Jesus are called to live as people of the light in a world that often walks in darkness.

The theologian John Stott once wrote:

“The Christian who looks for the coming of Christ is not idle but alert, not speculative but active.”

Paul’s message to the Thessalonians is clear:

The future belongs to Christ. So live differently now.

1. THE DAY OF THE LORD WILL COME UNEXPECTEDLY.

For you know quite well that the day of the Lord’s return will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night.

1 Thessalonians 5:2 (NLT)

This phrase — the Day of the Lord — comes from the Old Testament prophets.

It refers to the time when God will intervene in history to bring justice, judgment, and restoration.

Paul’s point is simple:

No one knows exactly when it will happen. It will come suddenly. Unexpectedly.

In fact, he says many people will be saying:

“Everything is peaceful and secure.” (v.3)

Life will seem normal. Business as usual.

And then suddenly God’s purposes will unfold.

Jesus used the same language.

“You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected.”

Matthew 24:44 (NLT)

The point of this teaching is not fear. It is readiness. Christians are not called to predict the future. They are called to live prepared.

The return of Christ should not produce anxiety.

It should produce faithfulness.

(Parable of the 10 virgins)

Presence People live today in light of eternity.

2. CHILDREN OF THE LIGHT LIVE DIFFERENTLY

For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don't belong to darkness and night. 6 So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded.

1 Thessalonians 5:5-6 (NLT)

This is an identity statement.

Believers belong to the light because they belong to Christ.

In the Bible, light represents:

- *truth*
- *holiness*
- *clarity*
- *God's presence*

Darkness represents:

- *sin*
- *deception*
- *spiritual blindness*

Paul says Christians no longer belong to darkness.

So they must not live like those who do.

“Stay alert and be clearheaded.” (v.6)

In other words:

Stay spiritually awake. Don't drift into moral sleep. Don't become spiritually numb.

The image Paul uses is striking.

At night people sleep and lose awareness. But those who live in the light must remain awake.

To live in the light means to live with awareness.

Awareness of God. Awareness of eternity. Awareness of how our lives reflect Christ.

Spiritual sleep often happens slowly.

Through distraction. Through compromise. Through neglect.

Presence People stay spiritually awake by remaining attentive to God.

3. HOPE GIVES STRENGTH TO ENCOURAGE OTHERS

For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. 10 Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. 11 So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:9-11 (NLT)

Paul then shifts from warning to encouragement.

This is the heart of the passage. Believers are not destined for wrath. They are destined for salvation.

The reason Christians can live with confidence is because of the work of Christ.

“Christ died for us so that... we can live with him forever.” (v.10)

The cross guarantees the future. The resurrection secures eternity.

And that hope leads to a responsibility within the church.

“Encourage each other and build each other up.” (v.11)

Hope is meant to be shared.

Theologian Jürgen Moltmann famously wrote:

“Christian hope does not merely comfort individuals; it creates a community of encouragement.”

In other words, the church becomes a place where believers strengthen one another.

Because life can be heavy. Faith can be difficult. Discouragement can be real.

And sometimes what someone needs most is a reminder:

God is still working. Christ is still coming. Hope is still alive.

Encouragement is one of the simplest but most powerful ministries in the church.

A conversation. A prayer. A word of truth.

These moments strengthen faith.

Conclusion

The return of Christ is not meant to create speculation.

*It is meant to produce **faithful living**.*

Paul calls believers to:

- *Stay spiritually alert*
- *Live as children of the light*
- *Encourage one another with the hope of salvation*

Presence People live differently because they know the future belongs to Christ.

CONNECT GROUP QUESTIONS:

Paul says the return of Christ will come “*like a thief in the night.*” How does knowing that Jesus could return at any time shape the way we live our everyday lives right now?

Paul reminds believers that we are “*children of the light.*” What does it practically look like to stay spiritually awake in a world that can easily lead us toward distraction or spiritual drift?

Paul finishes by saying, “*encourage each other and build each other up.*” Why do you think encouragement is so important in the Christian life?