

Acts 1: 6-7
1 Thessalonians 5: 1-10

1

Ready or Not

I think most of us remember playing hide and seek, where a bunch of us would be the hidiers and one person was the seeker or was "it". The "it" would count to 100 or whatever number chosen and then yell: ready or not, here I come. There was always some things certain: he/she was coming, he/she was coming when he/she was ready, he/she was coming whether you were ready or not, and if you weren't ready, you paid the consequences. Just take a moment and reflect on how this game parallels the second coming of Jesus and why the apostle Paul warned the church at Thessalonica of the importance of being ready.

There are many Christians waiting for the return of Jesus, but are there many of them watching for His return; the Bible doesn't teach us to wait for Jesus' return, but to watch for His return! The Bible teaches us to be wide awake watching for Jesus' return; the ones watching for His return will keep themselves alert and self-controlled, but those just waiting may slip into sloppy concern with other things and let priorities slip.

We, as Christians, know there is the certain return of Jesus and it is one of the most repeated teachings in all of Scripture. Paul was well aware of this and he explained that his readers should

be perfectly aware of this fact; as a matter of fact, he said he shouldn't even have to tell them again. There are simply some things that should be obvious without even asking, the imminent return of Jesus is one of those things.

The question isn't "if Jesus will return", but when will He return? Paul says it will be as a thief in the night, because no one knows when Jesus will return, just as a thief plans his entry at an uncertain time when least expected, so will be the coming of the Son of God. What did Jesus Himself say: "but of that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only." Jesus also warned that we had better be ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour when not expected.

Paul told the Thessalonians that he didn't have to write about dates and times, and the reason is that it isn't for us to know those things. Listen to what it says in Acts 1:6&7: when they came together, they asked Jesus, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "it is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority." There are things we are not meant to know until it happens, such as: when we will die, surprise birthday parties, when your mother-in-law is coming to stay, and when the Lord will return.

There is the need for alertness and a watchful attitude because a fallen man, which we all are, will have momentum towards slipping away from a firm commitment to Christ, possibly getting worse and worse if we aren't on guard. When Paul says that Jesus will come as a thief in the night, he is emphasizing how people outside of Christ will be caught off guard. For unbelievers, they will be caught off guard by Christ's coming, but for those of us watching for his return, it won't be a great surprise.

Jesus warned about people just living everyday as normal or with no thought or concern of His return; in other words, just ignoring Jesus and not living a life dedicated to Him and not living as a disciple. The apostle Peter said that the day of the Lord will come as a thief, the heavens will disappear with a roar, elements destroyed by fire, and the earth laid bare. Just as Noah preached for 120 years that the flood was coming, but people ignored him and they were caught off guard.

Paul also talked of people saying that there is peace and security, this is what the false prophets of the OT told the Israelites just before God would send some judgment on the people, and this will occur during the last days before final

judgment; this is when the non watchers or non alert will be caught in surprise.

As believers, we shouldn't be surprised or caught unawares, because we have the Scriptures that tell us the truth and *they* prophecy Jesus' return; if Jesus kept all His promises so far, why would He break this one? He will return.

Paul refers to Jesus' return, His second coming as the day of the Lord, this will be the signal that God will pour out His wrath on the ungodly, but believers don't have to worry because we will have been raptured to heaven, but there will be so many unprepared. We believers will not be in darkness because we won't be asleep, but alert and mentally sharp and we live alert, balanced, godly lives under control of the truth. We must guard ourselves against the influences of this world, not just the big ways to fail, but also the small attitudes that can be as damaging as big sins.

The ideas of darkness and light, night and day, being alert and self-controlled are expressed by Paul in Romans 13: he says the hour has come to be awake because our salvation is nearer than ever, *we are to* behave decently and clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. We should be motivated to be ready because of what Jesus has already done for us, He has appointed us to

receive His gift of salvation, in His infinite mercy and unboundless love, and consider the price He paid to do this.

In verse 10, we are told that Jesus died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, whether living or dead, we will live with Jesus forever, because He died as the substitute for our sins. Revelation 21:3&4 tell us that God will dwell with us and we with Him, He will wipe every tear from our eyes, there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain because the old order of things has passed away.

Why should we stay alert and self controlled? Because we aren't children of the dark who are appointed for wrath; God has prepared something better for us than what we have now, there is a future worth staying alert for. Even if Jesus doesn't come in our lifetime, we need to leave the next generation a witness of ^{us} having been on duty during our lifetime.

Paul says to encourage one another and build one another up, if our children look back on our lives, will they see servants of the Lord that have been faithful watching or will they see adults running around waiting for the Lord, but passing time doing a thousand different, possibly unimportant, things?

A question might be: are you just killing time waiting for Jesus to return or you really making time productive while watching for His return? The church's role awaiting Jesus' return is that of a sentry or guard, we are to be watchful or on guard duty and understand the days in which we live.

As a soldier is instructed to stay alert on his post, so must we as Christians; Paul says to watch, stay awake, and vigilant, and this is a present tense command, this is a continual practice for a Christian. A good guard is alert mentally and self-controlled, the church is moving closer to the day Christ will come, therefore be wide awake.

Being wide awake, alert, self-controlled will give us a peace of knowing that you are always ready for Jesus' return; therefore you will look with excitement and expectancy, instead of fear and dread. There will be the comfort of knowing you are saved from the wrath of God.

A quote by Joseph Bayly: "God's people should plan for a voyage of a thousand years, but be prepared to abandon ship tonight."