

Aughnacloy, Ballymagrane, Clogherney & Sixmilecross Presbyterian

Churches

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Matthew 24:3-5 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many.

Dear Friends

As your minister, it is a great privilege that I have in bringing this weekly devotion to you. Our theme today, is 'Concerning times and seasons' as we anticipate the return of the Lord. I trust that you are all keeping safe and well. As we wait with expectant hope of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ as we reflect on the next portion:

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 *"Now, brothers and sisters, 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 labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children 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 awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For 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. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."*

Prayer - Lord our heavenly father, with the words of the Psalmist and hymn writer we worship you. *"How lovely is Your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts to me. My soul*

is longing and fainting the courts of the Lord to see; my heart and flesh, they are singing for the joy of the living God: how lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts to me."

Lord you have not only created a world of beautiful sights and sounds, but you have provided us with the ability to enjoy it all. You have not only given us life, but you have created us to live in relationship with you and with each other. You have not only made us in your own image, but you have so designed us that we can think, plan and reflect on who we are and who we might become.

Lord, we confess that, despite your offer of free grace, we still seek to deserve your love; though you have told us that you have looked into our hearts, we still try to hide our true selves from you; Though you have given your life for us we still hold back part of our lives for ourselves. Lord change us and renew and set us free to be the persons you meant us to be from the very beginning. Lord hear us we pray in the living name of Jesus. **Amen.**

Today as we draw this section of 4:13-5:11 on the second coming of Christ to a conclusion, may we realise that in the present time there is much to maintain our hope and excitement about life, for we know that one day soon Jesus is coming and we will in faith, be with Him forever.

As the early twentieth century preacher and writer, Campbell Morgan of Westminster Chapel wrote: "To me the second coming is the perpetual light on the path which makes the present bearable. I never lay my head on my pillow without thinking that maybe before the morning breaks, the final morning may have dawned."

The Time! - For many of us, life seems to be an endless timetable of deadlines. There are appointments, meeting to attend, now the odd Zoom meeting to log into, there is a pre-set time scale for so many things and events in our lives. Therefore, it can be daunting to plan for this day that lies ahead, at a time we do not know. This has been the desire of mankind from even before Jesus died on Calvary. **Matt 24:3.** The reason we have for asking that question, may be that if only we knew, we could be ready, and so even in this present age there are those who continue to set dates for the return of Christ. Paul warns against such behaviour. Jesus, himself, tells us how it will be at the end. **Matt 24:36-41.** Things will, what we will call quite normal, Paul warns to be ready!

Be Ready - The thief does not tell you when he will arrive at your house. He takes us by surprise. v.3 reminds us that in times such as peace and safety, it takes less to startle us. I think we all like some degree of certainty out our future. Where are we to look for this peace and safety, that Paul speaks of? There was a time in the mid 20th century when there were many predictions of the end. To some degree there was quite a widespread world peace after the second world war and then with the formation of the United Nations and other peace keeping initiatives peace seemed quite secure. However, we must realise that the problem with this type of peace is that it is not rooted in the gospel. Paul is making the point, that as Christians we cannot find true peace unless it comes from the gospel. We cannot rest our faith and hope on a false peace.

Paul was writing to people who were being accused of breaking the peace the Roman Empire had imposed on the residents of Thessalonica. The gospel message they were declaring was turning the city on its head. **Act 17:6-9.**

They were highlighting that the peace of the empire was a false peace. When we call for peace and safety outside the gospel, we can be confident that it will not last. Like the visit of the thief in the night. Then also like the labour pains, there will be no escape.

As we bring both illustrations together, we find that although both are sudden, the thief is unexpected, but the labour is expected. We can say, therefore, that Christ's coming will be sudden and unexpected, as the thief and sudden and unavoidable, like the end of pregnancy. In the first case there will be no warning, and the second no escape. It is important to point out that in both cases preparations can be made. You can plan for a thief, have a burglar alarm or a big stick nearby, and you can plan for the pregnancy, such as have your bag packed.

Stay Alert - Paul; is not suggesting times or dates but emphasises the need to remain alert. Darkness and light, day and night. We can quite easily associate, light and day with alertness. When it comes to darkness and night, that is the time we are tired and not as alert. **1 Thess 5:5-6.** Paul is dividing people into two groups – those who see the light and those who do not. Paul calls us to be awake and sober, a drawing of a line in the sand. **V7** For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. These words take on a spiritual dimension because these are example of not being alert. To be self-controlled and clam in spirit, especially as we await the return of Jesus. Our hope is based on the knowledge that

he will return and that we are part of the children of light who are prepared for that return.

Know Jesus - Paul concludes this portion with the declaration that whether we are asleep or alive, our hope is the same, we will live with Jesus. Paul warns us of the wrath that will come with the day of the Lord. However, on that day of judgement we have no need to fear. If we believe upon Christ, we have not been destined for wrath. We have been destined for Salvation because we acknowledge that Jesus died for us. This good news gives us confidence and hope both now and for the future. Christ died for us. Christ took our wrath upon himself on the cross, the darkness of sin and misery. He died for us so that we might live and so that we might live in the light. We must not depend on the peace of our country or the power of the military. Rather we trust in Christ and know our peace comes from Him alone. Know Jesus as saviour, then there is no requirement to know the time or the season of His return. The day we look forward to is more than a date in our diary, we must be Ready, we must be Alert, we must know Jesus! **V11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.**

Prayer - Loving Lord we thank you today for the love, comfort and encouragement you are to us all in these present times as we look forward to Your Day. Lord satisfy our minds with your boundless love as at time we might seek to know a time of your return, knowing only the preparedness that you alone provide us in the everyday reality of our life. *"I'm pressing on the upward way, new heights I'm gaining every day; still praying, as I onward bound, 'Lord plant my feet on higher ground. Lord lift me up and let me stand, by faith, on heaven's table land; a higher plane than I have found, Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."* May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest remain and abide with us all, this day and forevermore. Amen.