Watch! Know that judgment is coming! (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3)

When the church in Thessalonica faced persecution, questions arose concerning the coming of Jesus and what would happen in the future. Paul reminded them what they already knew (5:1–3) which was enough to help define who they were and how they should be living (5:4–11). Knowing the future of those outside of Christ motivates us to be assured who we are, to care for how we live, and to share the gospel with those who need to hear it.

I. ***The day of the Lord is a time of God's wrath in judgment upon those who refuse to repent.***

The Old Testament provides most of our clear references to the day of the Lord (Isaiah 2, 13; Ezekiel 13, 30; Joel; Amos 5; Obadiah; Zephaniah 1; Malachi 4). It interprets for us the 3 or 4 undisputed references in the New Testament.

1. Preeminently, it is a day of judgment though blessing may follow. E.g., Zephaniah 1:14–18.
2. Generically, it is a day of judgment against immediate enemies of God, either rebellious Israel or the enemies of Israel.
3. Specifically, a day of judgment in the future against the unrighteous in Israel and the whole earth. E.g., Isaiah 2:12–21.
4. Uniquely, a day of judgment that will be called the great and terrible day of the Lord (Joel 2:31; Malachi 4:5).

II. ***The day of the Lord will arrive like a thief in the night.***

1. *The metaphor of coming like a thief describes the arrival of the day of the Lord.*
   a. Understandably the thief is uninvited, a secondary use of the metaphor (Joel 2:9; cf John 10).
   b. The thief arrives unannounced. So also is the coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:42–44; Luke 12:32–48). No one knows the day or the hour, only the Father (Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32). In the same manner the "times or dates" for the restoration of the kingdom has been withheld (Acts 1:6–7).
   c. The thief arrives unexpected (Matthew 24:44; Luke 12:40, 46), a yet stronger denial of the arrival.
2. *The coming of the day of the Lord is denied by people's counter claim of "peace and safety."*
   a. Ezekiel uses similar language (Ezekiel 13) in condemning false prophets who had not warned against the day of the Lord (13:5) but had led the people astray, saying "'"peace", when there is no peace" (13:10).
   b. Amos(5:18) wrote earlier that Israel also was deceived in expecting blessing rather than judgment.
   c. Paul may be implying a similar case of future deception (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:11; Revelation 12:9) of those who are not in Christ.
3. *The coming of the day of the Lord is like the sudden, inescapable labor pains of an expectant woman.*
   a. Though the labor of birth is expected, the final start of labor pains comes, like the thief, suddenly and unexpected.
   b. Just as the labor of birth is inevitable and irreversible, so also those upon whom God's judgment fall will not escape.

God's wrath will fall in judgment suddenly and unexpectedly upon the wicked who refuse to repent. This is what the Thessalonian believers knew. But they did not belong to that group. Wrath was not their destiny and alertness was to be their lifestyle.

Those without Christ are destined for certain judgment. Know which group you belong to. Wake up to the reality of inescapable judgment. Pray that you would want to see unbelievers saved, that God would give opportunities to share the gospel, boldness to speak, and clear words.

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