

## 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6(-11) - 3<sup>rd</sup> last Sunday (1911.2008)

### *Being ready for the Return of the Lord!*

<sup>1</sup> I really don't need to write to you about how and when all this will happen, dear brothers and sisters. <sup>2</sup> For you know quite well that the day of the Lord will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> When people are saying, "All is well; everything is peaceful and secure," then disaster will fall upon them as suddenly as a woman's birth pains begin when her child is about to be born. And there will be no escape.

<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don't belong to darkness and night. <sup>6</sup> So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be sober.

The end of the year is on us. Not quite the end of the calendar year yet - we still have just more than 50 days as far as that is concerned. Yet, for students the end of the year has already started - for some it is the end of their time at school. The end is coming - whether you are ready or not. The end of the year looms also for shops - the time of the year when they traditionally are busier than at any other time, although that might be a bit different in this year.

The end of the year is coming - that demands being prepared, because we know that this year-end will come. There is no way of avoiding the fact of this end, just as a pregnant woman can't avoid the time of her contractions and the birth of the child she is carrying.

The end is coming - that applies to our lives as well. For the year-end the date is set; at the birth of a child we know approximately when that will take place.. However, the day we are all living toward is one whose date we don't know. That does not mean that we should just ignore it, however. For us, who know of this coming day, the message is clear: we are live in such a way that we are

### *ready for the Return of the Lord!*

We all know what to do when we expect visitors - everything must be got in order; the best cups are set out, cake and cookies are set out, ready for the arrival of our visitors. When we expect somebody who will stay overnight, we make up the beds. Of course it means extra work, but it's no great chore, because we do it in the expectation of the time we will spend together with our guests

The day of the Lord is coming - that is not to some kind of threat to us, but a

reminder of the goal which has been set for our lives. Our Lord is coming - and we may look forward to His coming and the time we will spend with Him! It will be the day on which all we have hoped for and believed, will at last be fulfilled!

For many there is little of this anticipation, however. After all this talk about the return of the Lord in great power and might, visible for all to see, has been going on for the past 2000 years!

Do we really believe that this day will still take place? Paul says here that we as Christians are aware of this day, yet, so often it seems as if it is the last thing on our minds. Do we really have to think of that right now? Sure, we hope that this day of our Lord will come, but is it not still far off? Right now - so we often think - we need to get on with our lives and with making a living. There is so much to fill up our days - our jobs, our families, the studies, our hobbies - not necessarily in that order.

The Day of the Lord is coming - that is not a date marked on our calendars, but its coming is certain, because it has been entered on God's calendar.

Can you imagine the embarrassment if an important visitor should pitch up - and its quite clear that we had forgotten that he was coming. Nothing is ready! Perhaps that has happened to you, that you rang the bell - and the people you were coming to see had forgotten about it. Or - even more embarrassing - you forgot that you had made this date. Of course they understand, what with all the things we have on our minds - but it makes a clear statement about us and about our relationship with this visitor, if we should not be ready when they arrive.

The Day of the Lord is coming - **you know quite well that the day of the Lord will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night.** That does not mean that Jesus will come *as* a thief - that He comes to take something from us. Yet, so often we act as if we are afraid of the return of the Lord. Have we forgotten that it is the Coming of Him, who became human for you and for me - of course He did so also so that we could celebrate Christmas. But He had much more in mind with His coming. He was thinking of you! Of me! - of each one of us!

Jesus came so that we should be made aware of the fact that our lives should not simply consist in trying to assure our future and the future of our children. He came to open up a future for us. It is a future which is not - as it may often seem to us - to lie just out of reach. In fact with Jesus' coming our future has already arrived - and we have His assurance that we will also experience it to the fullest measure!

Jesus came to free us from the fears which so often fill our lives - it is a fear for many in our country, of thieves literally breaking into their homes at night! We are to experience His presence with us now already, and we are to have the assurance that He is with us on every day.

There is more that he has in store for us, however. He wants us to be right there where he is. It's not just a case of him wanting to give us a friendly wave - as we might do when we see somebody who looks familiar to us. Our Lord wants to celebrate a wonderful banquet with us - and nobody will have to sweat in the kitchen to get it ready!

Our preparations for His coming are to be different. We are to be made aware of the fact that we are **children of the light and of the day**. We no longer **don't belong to darkness and night**. What we need to know is that we need to **be on our guard, not asleep like the others**. That is why the call to us is: **Stay alert and be sober**.

We have been brought into the light of the Lord - and this light must light up our lives. We need to direct it at the things which take up so much of our time. We need to direct it at our relationships. Whatever cannot stand the test of this light, should also not have any place in our lives.

We are no longer in the darkness - even though it may at times still seem very dark and threatening around us. Yet, the 'valley of the shadow of death' will not destroy us, because the Good Shepherd is at our side. He comes to us and offers us His light and His love. He stands at our door, and knocks: He offers us His salvation.

It is for the Coming of this Lord that we are to prepare ourselves - day after day. His light and His love are to fill us. Each day we are to experience His saving grace in our lives. We must not stumble through the darkness any more - even if that does not mean that we always understand what is happening in our lives, what is happening around us. Yet, we may know - in spite of what we may feel - that He is there. That He is here for you! And He is here for me!

Jesus is here for us - and because that is so we also have His commission. Our preparing for His coming may not only centre on us. After all we are not busy with a children's game like hide-and-seek any more where everybody is concerned only with their own hiding place.

As children of light our preparing for the Lord and His coming cannot only lie in sunning ourselves in this light. As children of light we are to be *lights for the world*.

The light which has touched our lives is to shine into the darkness around us - and not only at Christmas!

There are so many people who have no real future ahead of them - those who have no real prospects of celebrating Christmas, whether it is that they have nothing to spend on gifts or 'Christmas cheer'; whether it is that their future is bleak, because they failed their matric exam, or even if they passed, have no prospect of getting a job. For them it may be as if their whole life is has only shadow and darkness. Jesus wants His light to shine on these people through us. He wants to save them from their dark and meaningless life and bring them into the brightness of His light - through us.

We are to prepare ourselves, because our Lord is coming. He is coming to you. He is coming to me. So there is nothing more important for us than to expect his coming: to wait and hope for that day.