

Prayer

Bring us happiness today, Lord Jesus! Lift our hearts to sing our songs of faith with joy, to listen to Your Word with care, to receive Your challenge with zeal, to share the fellowship of Your people with love, and to work with Your church on earth with commitment. May this be a glorious day of love, peace and action, O Lord; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Light

We take light for granted, yet it is essential to life. This week we will focus our prayers on how we use light. Pray today for the poor who have to rely completely on the sun for light.

On-going prayers

- *Pray about the growing conflict in some regions of Pakistan*
- *Pray for the key political issues in your country at the moment*
- *Give thanks for the love and care shown to you by other people*

Meditation

He is the Lord, He is Christ our Saviour.

He is the Righteous Judge to whom we appeal for mercy,
who knows that truth will set us free.

He is the Counsellor whose caring support lasts forever;
who knows our mind, soul and spirit.

He is the Father who remembers His love for His children,
who places us in fellowship with others.

He is the Guide whose pathway and guidance is sure;
who is with us as we pass through trials.

He is the Covenant Lord, who loves us more than we know;
who knows our beginning and our end.

He is the God of power whose strength is always with us,
who constantly fights our enemies for us.

He is the Lord, He is Christ our Saviour.

Bible Study - 1 Thess 5:6-11

⁶ So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep alert and sober; ⁷ for those who sleep, sleep at night; and those who are drunk are drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has not appointed us for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with Him. ¹¹ Therefore, encourage each other and build up each other, just as you are doing.

Review

Paul continues to round up his thoughts about Christ's future return, and in this passage, he puts together a helpful set of comments about what it might mean to live in the light of Christ's return. The whole passage rests on a comparison between the day and the night, representing light and darkness, and also moral 'right' and 'wrong'. As so often with Paul, we should be careful with his illustration because it is used in a limited way. The opening comment; 'Let us not fall asleep as others do ...' is clearly a spiritual assessment with powerful overtones, but by the time we get to the end of the passage, Paul has left his analogy behind; '... so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with Him' (5:10). The real pearl of this passage is probably Paul's inclusion here of the illustration, '... the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet the hope of salvation'. This description of armour returns in Ephesians, one of Paul's later letters, where Paul has developed it into the well known and comprehensive 'whole armour of God' (Ephesians 6:10-17).

Paul's first illustration about belonging 'to the day' is about being alert for the Lord's coming, and the theme is very similar to Jesus' call to 'be at work when the Master arrives' (Matt 24:46). The passage also mocks those who 'sleep' when they should be awake (5:7), and who are therefore ignorant of what God is doing and fail to join in with what He does. The first verse is intriguing, however, where it says 'let us not fall asleep as others do'. On the one hand, this appears to add no more to what has been said, but this seems a rather harsh judgement on pagans who have not yet had a chance to respond to the Gospel and understand what God was doing. On the other hand, it might just say something more to the church community itself. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus called on His disciples to 'keep wake', just before His arrest. Paul does not mention this directly and it is unlikely that he would be directly critical of apostles such as Peter and John, who were the 'pillars' of the church at the time Paul wrote. The hint of a connection with this incident is enough, however, for us to think that Paul was not simply criticising those outside the church whose lifestyles were inappropriate and ungodly (getting drunk – 5:6,7). He may well have been suggesting strongly to the church community that some within it were not awake, and keeping themselves fit and ready for the Lord's active service.

Paul wanted to see all God's people alert and active in His service whilst it was still 'day', and there was plenty of 'Gospel' work to be done. It is interesting to see that Paul's assumption about the nature of this work was that it was a battle. The famous 'breastplate of faith and love' and the 'helmet of salvation' (5:8) were protective pieces of armour worn in readiness for battle. It would be hard to sleep with a heavy Roman breastplate strapped to one's chest, or the uncomfortable but protective helmet still on one's head! What is truly interesting about this passage is not so much the fact that Paul clearly added to the concept of 'armour' in following years before delivering to us as the 'whole armour of God' (Eph 6:13f.), but where he obtained the idea. It comes from this passage in Isaiah

He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; (Isaiah 59:17)

In this prophecy, Isaiah describes the Lord coming to earth to deal with the continuing sin of humanity after He had sent His Messiah (the 'Suffering Servant'). By putting on this armour, God was preparing for His final defeat of evil, and Paul took this picture and used it to speak about how a Christian might be ready for the end times. He replaced 'righteousness' with 'faith and love', for now through Christ, faith and love were indeed the means of righteousness, but the rest is virtually the same! By the time of writing Ephesians, Paul developed this simple but effective quote from Isaiah into an all-encompassing description of the Christian's state of preparedness for the final battle against evil. For unless the sermons you have heard on the 'whole armour of God' have misinformed you, this is indeed the armour necessary for the 'last stand' against Satan, which Christ will win ('for our struggle is not against flesh and blood ...' Eph 6:10-12).

In our passage, Paul is positive and upbeat. He is confident about salvation in Christ (5:9), of victory in Christ (5:10), and of the preparedness of the Thessalonians to work together to do God's will (5:11). So here in Thessalonians, the armour of God is not something to be taken up, but a gift already given ('having put on the breastplate ...' 5:8). It belongs to God, as Isaiah says, but having been given to us as part of our salvation, let us put on and use God's gift!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. To what extent are all God's people ready for Christ's coming in glory and the work of the Kingdom?
2. Discuss what the 'breastplate' and the 'helmet' of God's armour might mean to you?
3. How can we ensure that we remain ready to do the work of God, according to the call of Scripture?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Throughout my life I have wondered whether I have been truly ready for what God has required of me. I have often wondered, looking back, whether I have been as ready and prepared as I have felt, and wondered why it is that in hindsight, I think I have been held up by all manner of issues and perhaps not done those things that I ought to have done. We cannot revisit the past, but we can learn from it. It is important that we are ready to criticise what we have done in the past, but also lay this before the Lord and seek His wisdom and blessing for what we can learn, and how to go forward. Being ready is often about being willing to move on.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- Consider the armour of God mentioned in this passage. Reflect on how faith and love may be likened to a 'breastplate' and how salvation may be likened to a 'helmet'. What does this mean for your fight against the enemy?
- Pray for the protection of God's people as they go about doing the work of the Gospel today. Many people feel under significant attack and find it hard to understand why they have difficulty when they place their trust in Christ. Pray that God will enable His church to grow and demonstrate the defeat of Satan

Final Prayer

We offer You our love, Heavenly Father, for you have loved us with a love that is beyond our understanding. Cleanse our impurities and make us worthy of everything You have done for us, and continue to do this for us day by day. Accept our thanks, today and every day, and guide us into all truth. Thank You heavenly Father; AMEN