

BE AWAKE!
I. Fully Clothed
II. Fully Confident

Dear Christians one and all rejoice because your salvation is near! Amen.

The texts that Vicar Casmer read are clear indications that we are in the portion of the Church season which is called "end times" and today we specifically observe the Sunday of Last Judgment. Talking about court cases and especially the final verdict or judgment can be very intense. I am sure that many of us have followed some case or another wondering and anticipating what the verdict will be. Maybe some of you remember high profile cases such as OJ Simpson, Martha Stewart or last summer's case concerning Michael Jackson. Everybody has their own opinion as to what the outcome will be and when the jury finally reconvenes after hours or even days of deliberating many, especially the defendant, wait intensely. The Old Testament prophet Daniel paints for us the picture of a courtroom that is unlike any other. God is the judge and jury and you and I with the rest of the world stand before him on trial with all of our sins laid out before him.

Judgment day is something that is very real and it is a day that everyone will experience. That is an overwhelming truth to know that we will stand before God on the last day. The Last Judgment is a day that has been anticipated by many including you and I. However, we cannot go to our 2005 or 2006 calendars and pinpoint when that day will exactly be. Listen to what Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10. "Now, brothers, 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 labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape."

A thief does not send an announcement to let you know when he is going to rob you. A thief does not give to you a courtesy call to remind you of the appointment that he has made to rob you of your possessions. Thieves depend on surprise and rely on catching someone unexpectedly. God's judgment day is going to catch many individuals by surprise. People will be living their lives like they always have, from hour to hour and day to day, when judgment comes like labor pains on a pregnant woman. One of my friends was in the delivery room with his wife and after several hours of labors she slid herself to the edge of the bed, grabbed on to his arm and said, "Get my coat. We are not doing this today." We all know that when a baby starts coming that no matter how badly the mother wants to change her mind about having a baby that it is too late. By sheer will you cannot stop a baby from being born. Judgment day will be like labor pains for many and no matter how hard they try they will not be able to stop it. For unbelievers it will be a day of destruction from which they cannot escape God's wrath.

Speaking about the last day can be very intense and overwhelming. However, Paul did not write these words to terrify us or make us live in fear of when the day will come. Just the opposite! God preserved this portion of Scripture so that you and I would be eager for the day as we stand before the judge filled with joy. Judgment day is an event that we can look forward to and actually celebrate because we will not stand before God's throne as his enemies or a criminal. Paul reminded the Thessalonians and he reminds us that we are brothers and sisters through faith, which make us forgiven children of God. 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8, "But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons 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 alert and self-controlled. 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 self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet." We are a family of believers. We are called sons of the light and sons of the day. You are not stumbling around this world in the shadows of unbelief and despair. We have the light of the world, who is Jesus, living in our hearts and therefore you are no longer living in the darkness of sin.

You do not belong to the dark ruler Satan but instead you have been won by the light of the world who has overcome the darkness of sin for you! Therefore you and I cannot resort back to the sinful ways of the world. We are not like unbelievers who live in darkness not having God's word or not knowing the Lord. We can have unbelieving friends but it should be very apparent that our thoughts and actions come from a

heart that loves Jesus. Remember, we live in this world but we are not of the world! Paul says that we are not like those who are asleep. When a person is sleeping usually they are oblivious to what is going on around them. Unbelievers are oblivious to what the meaning of life is and what God's will is. You and I are not like that! Paul also describes the world as being drunk. He is not necessarily talking about large quantities of alcohol. People who are drunk lose awareness and their senses become dull. Those who live in sin become dull. They lie to their consciences so that they are not plagued with sin. I am sure that many of us know individuals who do not believe. Most of them would probably deny the fact that Jesus was going to return at all. They have become dull to that fact living their lives in darkness.

But remember who you are. You are children of the day who need to be self-controlled and constantly alert. However that is easier said than done because Satan, the sinful influence around us, and the sin that lives in our hearts is always waging war. We have to be careful that we do not fall into a spiritual sleepiness. When I moved from North Carolina to Wisconsin I hopped in the car with my family at 4 a.m. and started on the long drive. We drove until 1 a.m. the next morning. After 21 hours of solid driving only stopping for gas I had to pull over. My eyes were tired and things were getting blurry. I lost my awareness. As we travel through this life it is easy to get tired and even feel emotionally and spiritually drained. It is easy for sinful individuals to drop their guard and let the darkness of sin lull them into apathy. The apostle Paul wrote these words 2,000 years ago and when he wrote them he did it with urgency. Paul lived his life everyday as if Jesus was going to come at any time. But after centuries of waiting and wondering when it is easy for you and me to lose our sharp awareness that judgment day is soon. Instead of focusing on the goal we tend to be people who focus on the journey. We lament the fact that life is sometimes an uphill struggle. Or just the opposite, we tend to overindulge and lose our focus when things are going really well. We can easily become consumed with struggles or with joys that cause us to fall into spiritual sleepiness and we forget that we need to be looking past this life to the one that is to come.

But, how? How do we deal with everything that happens to us in this world? How can we be fully alert and awake prepared for the judgment day? God simply says, "be ready by being fully clothed." I could be mistaken but I don't think one of us, not even the little ones, is still dressed in their pj's. When the sun comes up and the light breaks we get out of bed and prepare ourselves for the day by getting dressed. Be fully clothed by dressing yourself in God's garments. Paul says put on the breastplate of faith and love along with the helmet of salvation! Faith is simply trusting in the promises of God. Faith clings to the forgiveness that Christ won for us on the cross and trusts that our risen Savior is always with us providing strength and power. Faith wards off temptation and says no to ungodliness. That is what defends us from Satan's attacks and frees us from guilt. We have the breastplate of love, which is putting our God-given faith into action! God's promises motivate us to live God-pleasing lives. When we put on the breastplate of faith and love we are not adorning ourselves with spiritual pj's but instead with strength and power. But through this tough life faith can start to dwindle and sometimes our love is not very evident. So, Paul tells us to be fitted with the helmet of salvation. Having the certain hope that we are saved, that sin has been forgiven, that we are children of the light, sustains our faith and love until our Savior returns.

Be awake, judgment day is coming. Be awake and fully clothed ready to stand before Jesus Christ fully confident. Judgment day can be overwhelming to ponder and some even use this day as a threat to others by saying, "Wait till judgment day and you will get what is coming." But we need not fear. Listen to the words of Paul, 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11, "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."

God does not get pleasure by sending people to Hell so that they can feel the full brunt of his anger. No, God wants all men to be saved by coming to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. God did not want us to suffer so out of his grace he sent his Son to suffer for us! Through faith in Jesus Christ every believer has been saved. Everyone of you with faith in your heart will stand before the Lord someday not filled with fear and terror but instead with awe and joy as you hear the verdict, "You are forgiven, come with me and live with me in Heaven." You and I will live with God! The message that we have is life giving and life sustaining. As a family of believers let us use this message to encourage each other as we face the struggles of life not alone but together. Think about how encouraging it is to have a full church singing, praying, and confessing our faith together that is encouraging. But it goes far beyond the doors of church. You and I are

a family, brothers and sisters waiting eagerly for Christ to take us into glory. While we wait let us be awake and alert fully clothed with faith and fully confident that we have been found innocent through the Son of God. With that knowledge let us always pray, "Come Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen."

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