Daybreak: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Paul assumes that his readers know that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. What is the common theme that can be traced through prophetic references to ‘The Day of the Lord’ in Isaiah 13:6-11; Amos 5:18-20; Joel 1:15; 2:1-11, 30-32; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:14-15; Malachi 4:5-6?

There is a strange juxtaposition here as Paul talks about daytime coming in the middle of the night like a thief: why do you think he does this, and what effect does it have on us as readers? There is another vivid contrast in v.2, as he portrays sudden destruction coming upon those who think they are peaceful and secure. The overall effect of his language may be to jolt us, as readers of his letter, out of any sense of complacency. Do we need jolting in this way? If you find all this a bit disturbing, is that a good or a bad thing? What do you think he intends to convey by the image of labour pains coming upon a pregnant woman? What can we do to get ready for the coming Day of the Lord?

What is the practical difference between being a child of the light or of the day, and belonging to the night or the darkness?

When Paul talks about putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and the helmet of the hope of salvation, he is drawing on imagery taken from Isaiah 59:17. How has Paul adapted Isaiah’s imagery? Does looking at Isaiah 59:17 help us to understand 1 Thessalonians 5:8, and if so, how? What do you think that Paul talks about putting on armour, rather than just ordinary working clothes? Is there a sense in which we are protected by faith, love and hope? Where else do you find this triad (1 Corinthians 13:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3)? To what extent should these three qualities characterise our lives as Christians? To what extent do they characterise our lives as Christians?

In 1 Thessalonians 5:10, Paul talks about being awake or asleep: how does his use of the imagery here differ from how he uses it in 5:6-7? Do you find this confusing or helpful?

In 5:11, Paul exhorts his readers to encourage each other and to build one another up, but the first word in this verse is ‘Therefore’. It has been said that whenever you see the word ‘therefore’ in the Bible, you should ask what it is there for. So then, what kind of link does Paul make between this call to mutual encouragement and what he has said before? Do you think we are good at encouraging each other and building each other up at Brighton Road? Why or why not, and what can you do to improve this? Who are you going to encourage this week, and how?

‘Almighty Father, whose blessed Son at his coming among us brought redemption to his people, and peace to men of goodwill; grant that, when he shall come again in glory to judge the world and to make all things new, we may be found ready to receive him, and enter into his joy; through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.’

(Frederick B. MacNutt, *The Hodder Book of Christian Prayers*)