"*Total Eclipse of the Heart*"

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10

May God our Savior shower you with his undeserved love, his mercy, and the peace that only Christians can know. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Reading the title as you have, I can guess what came to mind for many, perhaps most – the 1983 song by Bonnie Tyler. While most would probably admit they like the song, I'm guessing pretty much no one has any idea what the song is really all about. It's got a pretty melody, and it talks about hearts and love, someone called "Bright Eyes" and something about *"living in a powder keg and giving off sparks"* (which doesn't sound healthy.) What you probably didn't know is that a guy named Jim Steinman wrote it originally as a love song for vampires, of all things, entitled "Vampires in Love." Thus the pervasive theme of "darkness," which he just shined up a bit to make it sound innocuous and sell more records.

The world has co-opted so much that is good for their dark purposes (think rainbows, crosses worn as jewelry by the godless, etc.) this morning we will return the favor. An eclipse, by its very nature, is that which robs light and ushers in darkness. When you remove our title from the strange and disturbing idea of "vampire love" and think in terms of the spiritual heart of a living, breathing human being, a "total eclipse of the heart" is the last thing a human being could want. Whether they recognize it or not, to have a heart plunged into the darkness of sin and unbelief is, quite literally, the very worst thing possible. It is to just this sort of warning that our text for this morning takes us – to the incompatibility of light and darkness and the creeping, progressive nature of the eclipse of the light of our Savior-God. Our text is found recorded in Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians, the Fifth Chapter:

ESV **1 Thessalonians 5:1-10** ***Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 4 But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. 5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. 6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get 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 destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.***

This is God's Word. Remind yourself each time you hear or read words from the Bible that these are *God's* words, and that they therefore offer perfect, divine wisdom and insights for all generations. God himself has told us, ***"Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and treasure it!"*** As we prepare to hear and take to heart these words of our God, so also we pray, ***"Sanctify us in the truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."*** Amen.

It's both interesting and informative that Paul begins our text by saying, ***"Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you,"*** but then goes on to do just that – to write to them about times and seasons. Why does God the Holy Spirit, writing though his servant Paul, write to them the very thing that he himself said he had no need to write? First of all, he didn't say they didn't need to *hear* what he had to say. They obviously did, or He wouldn't have moved Paul to write it. He was telling them, in effect, that he wasn't writing about something they didn't already know, probably because he had already told them. Clearly we all need to be reminded of the important things we already know, but there's more than just forgetfulness at work in the world. There's also the eclipse.

Most of you have seen eclipses, maybe even total eclipses. What did you notice about them? For one thing, they aren't sudden, are they. The darkness doesn't arrive all at once. It creeps in, like some giant rheostat or dimmer is gradually turning down the light of the sun itself. That is, in fact, the nature of evil. That's the nature of the danger facing every child of God. Unbelief almost never arrives suddenly. It's most often the result of the slow, creeping darkness of the world around us – the darkness with which we can become all too tolerant, all too comfortable. That darkness slowly, incrementally, unremarkably finds its way into our hearts and lives. No Christian is immune. In fact, woe to the man or woman who imagines otherwise.

And yet Paul in our text didn't go right to darkness, did he; that is, he didn't start there. He started with the true, basic explanation of exactly why all that he says is so important, which is that the "day of

the Lord" (Judgment Day) will *not* come gradually or imperceptibly. It will arrive suddenly, and with no chance whatsoever of escape.

What that means, in practical terms, is that no one will have time to *"get right with the Man upstairs."* There will be no time or opportunity to repent and believe. It will be the ultimate *"Ready or not, here I come."* Appalling numbers will simply not be ready. In fact they will long for *anything* but a face-to-face meeting with the Savior they have rejected. They are those who, according to Jesus himself, ***"will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.'"*** ESV(Luke 23:30) *"Hide us,"* they will beg, *"from the terrible judgment that has come. Anything at all will be preferable."*

Nor is this warning written only to others. That will also be you and me if we allow the darkness that is all around us to eclipse the light of our Savior from our hearts. Each must ask the question of ourselves: *"Is there darkness that I am allowing into my heart?"* Obviously that darkness takes many forms. It is up to the individual Christian to identify it and to purge it from our lives. Is it greed, or pride, or lust in your life? Is it lying, stealing, drunkenness or other substance abuse? Is it trusting in something more than in your Savior-God? Are you neglecting regular immersion in God's Word, loving something more than your Savior, neglecting the needs of others? Are you a gossip, a complainer, or do you lack Godly contentment? All is darkness, and all has the terrible power to separate us from the light of Christ Jesus our Savior and plunge us into the darkness of Satan's kingdom.

I recently read a sobering question: *"If someone were to spend one week continually by your side, would that person be able to identify you as a Christian without you having to tell him?"*

Do you find all of this troubling? Uncomfortable? Even terrifying? Every one of us should, for this is law, and God's holy law must always cut, crush, terrify every sinner. With uncompromising finality our text declares that on that sudden, terrible Day of Judgment, God's enemies simply ***"will not escape."***

There will be no warning to precede or in any way prepare for that day. In fact even Christians tend to have misguided expectations of when to expect Christ's return. When, for example, do *you* find yourself imagining that Jesus could return at any minute? It's when things look the absolute worst, isn't it. When catastrophe strikes and all seems chaotic and lawless. The apocalyptic movies all portray a used-up earth where human beings exist as brute beasts and all that was good in life has been lost. Yet what does our text say about that day? ***While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them.*** Jesus described his Second Coming this way: ***"Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. [27] They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. [28] Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot-- they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, [29] but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all-- [30] so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed."*** ESV(Luke 17:26-30)

The words of warning in our text include also you, as they included those Thessalonian Christians to whom they were first written: Don't fall into spiritual sleep. Be watchful, sober, live in constant expectation of Jesus' return.

But those aren't the only words that apply to you. That's not the only message God's children are to take to heart. Hear also these words from our text: ***You are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. [5] For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.***

Why? How are we not of the darkness? Not because we've been good or done good. It's because the eclipse, the darkness – your darkness and mine – fell upon Jesus. God the Father laid the guilt of the world upon his Son and then abandoned him to the cross where there he paid for all.

It is really only when we have been truly brought to fully recognize the shameful darkness of our lives of sin and the terror that God's great and terrible Day of Wrath would have meant for us that we can come to appreciate the light into which our Savior has brought us – the forgiveness and peace that he has earned for us.

In fact it is extraordinarily difficult even to come to terms with the reality of future promises, both good and bad, when those promises seem to always lie in the distant future. From childhood we've been told of heaven, of Jesus' return, and of Judgment Day. Yet how difficult to maintain an absolute and uninterrupted confident expectation of such amazing truths. As our God wants us to take his warnings to heart, so also he wants us to take to heart his promises. Trusting those promises should include actually thinking about them – often. These are not

fairytales meant to make us feel better. They are immutable, divine promises that absolutely will be kept. Suddenly, when mankind is fully convinced that all will go on as it has, Christ our Savior will return, the dead will rise, and both we and they will be judged. That Day will hold unimaginable terror for the children of darkness – which is exactly why our God continually warns us to flee from all that is darkness – but it will hold no terror for you. Again, not because you are worthy. Not because you have done good or earned your place. Just the opposite. It will hold no terror for you because you have been brought to know and believe two truths. First, that you are totally *unworthy*, and second, that you trust that your Savior Jesus alone earned and provided you with the necessary righteousness to enter his heaven.

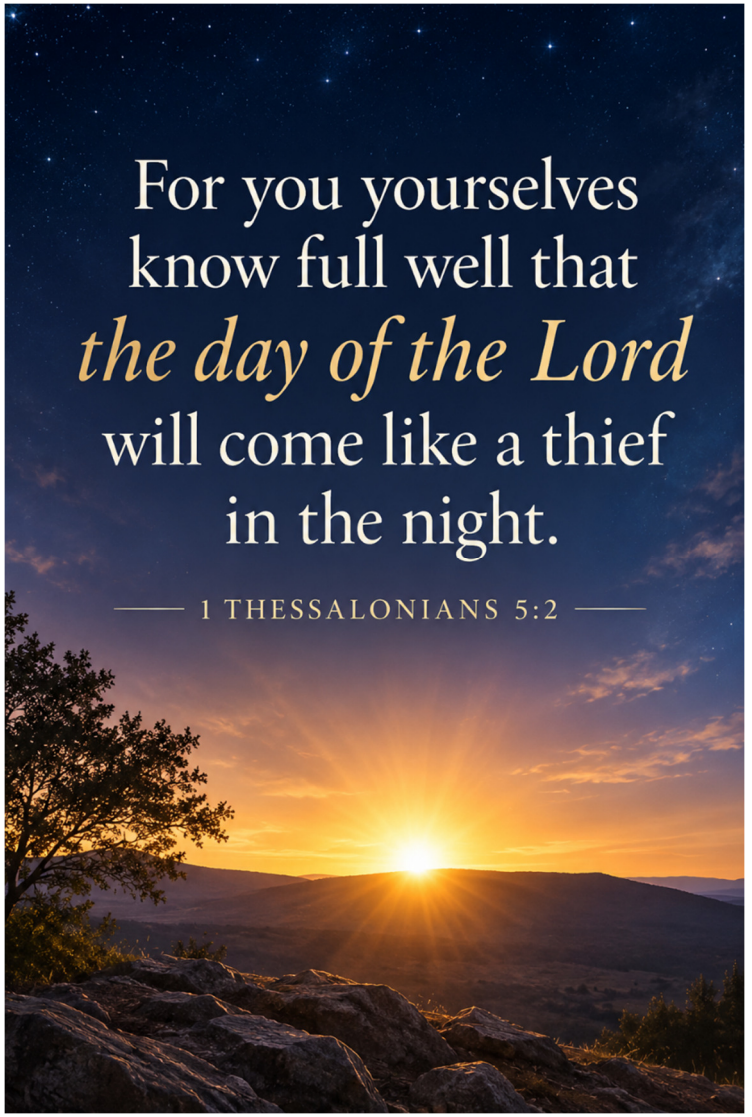
God the Holy Spirit himself, through his Apostle Paul, summed up this divine, immutable truth in the last verses of our text: ***For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.***

Let this be the light in which you walk – that Jesus has already earned both your forgiveness and your passage into his eternal heaven. Trusting alone in Jesus Christ, you are and will remail a ***child of light***. As you pass through each day of our life on earth, fleeing the darkness that is all around you, do not rob yourself of the continual joy of this saving truth. Contemplate instead the absolute reality, the immutable certainty, of the promises God himself has given you. You will one day see Jesus, with unimaginable joy, and he will carry you to heaven to exist forever in the presence of the God who created you. Amen.

ESV **Zephaniah 1:7-8, 12-15** Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the
LORD is near; the LORD has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests. 8
And on the day of the LORD's sacrifice-- "I will punish the officials and the king's
sons and all who array themselves in foreign attire… 12 At that time I will search
Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say
in their hearts, 'The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill.' 13 Their goods shall be
plundered, and their houses laid waste. Though they build houses, they shall not
inhabit them; though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them." 14
The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of
the LORD is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. 15 A day of wrath is that day, a
day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and
gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.

ESV **Matthew 25:14-15, 19-30** "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who
called his servants and entrusted to them his property. 15 To one he gave five
talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went
away… 19 Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled
accounts with them. 20 And he who had received the five talents came forward,
bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I
have made five talents more.' 21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and
faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter
into the joy of your master.' 22 And he also who had the two talents came forward,
saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents
more.' 23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have
been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'
24 He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew
you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you
scattered no seed, 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground.
Here you have what is yours.' 26 But his master answered him, 'You wicked and
slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I
scattered no seed? 27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers,
and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. 28 So take
the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. 29 For to everyone
who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who
has not, even what he has will be taken away. 30 And cast the worthless servant into
the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

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you have no need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves are fully
aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are
saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them
as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 4 But you
are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. 5 For you are
all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. 6
So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. 7 For
those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get 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 destined us for
wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us so
that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.



St Paul Lutheran Church

Bismarck, North Dakota

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Michael Roehl, Pastor

25th Sunday after Pentecost – November 15, 2026

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 564 *(Stanzas 1-4)*
"Just as I Am, Without One Plea"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 1ff. *(Blue Hymnal)*

The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

The Old Testament Lesson: (Zephaniah 1:7-8, 12-15) Despite the current troubles, our society has been lulled into a certain complacency – especially in spiritual matters. One of the most dangerous by-products of this false sense of security is the notion that Judgment Day – if it even exists at all – will hold no terror for "good people" – as defined by the world. Our Old Testament lesson reminds us of the true nature of that Day for all unbelievers.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 119 (Page 98)

The New Testament Lesson (Matthew 25:14-15, 19-30) While the reality of Judgment Day should hold great terror for all unbelievers, it should hold no terror whatsoever for Christians. In fact it is the unique consolation of the children of God to know that they will stand un-accused and unafraid on that great day of reckoning. It is also true that while we await that day, we will seek to put to good use the gifts and talents that He has given us. This we long to do according to the new man within us, but our service remains imperfect.

The Confession of Faith -
The Apostolic Creed *(Blue Hymnal page 5)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 582
"Wake, Awake, For Night Is Flying"

The Sermon – Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 *(Printed on the back page)*
"Total Eclipse of the Heart"

The Offertory – (Blue Hymnal page 7)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 592
"Jerusalem, Jerusalem"

The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 564 *(Stanzas 5-6)*
"Just as I Am, Without One Plea"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (35) Average (35)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	**-9:00 a.m.**	**–** Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	**–** Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	**–** Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	**-6:00 p.m.**	**–** Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	**–** Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	**-9:00 a.m.**	**–** Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	**–** Worship Service with Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	**–** Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Stefan Sonnenfeld is considering the call to St. Luke's of Lemmon. Pastor Michael Wilke has returned the calls to Gift of God of Mapleton and St. Paul's of Ponsford, MN. Pastor Neal Radichel has returned the call to Holy Cross of Phoenix, AZ. Pastor Paul Krause has accepted the call to Mt. Zion of Detroit, MI. Pastor Chad Seybt has accepted the call to Trinity of Watertown and Zion of Hidewood, SD.

Church Council Notes – The Council met on November 8th. October offerings were $404 above budgeted needs but remain $9,013 below budgeted needs YTD. Trustee Coordinator Johnson reported that the porch roofing project is complete and that a new dryer vent has been installed. Work is ongoing on procedures manuals, copyright compliance, and process documentation. Phil Pfennig and Pastor Roehl will serve on this year's Nominating Committee. The Council terms of Keith Mantz and Brian Fettig expire in 2026, and Timothy Meyer on the Board of Elders The next Council meeting is scheduled for December 14th and the Annual Voters Meeting for December 20th.

Used Cell Phones – There is an ongoing need for used cell phones in our overseas seminaries. See Pastor Roehl if you have an older cell phone you are no longer using and would like to donate.