**A THIEF IN THE NIGHT**

***Watching For Christ’s Return (#2)***

“*The day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night*” (I Thess. 5:2).

I will always remember the phone call. Benita and I were in Colorado on vacation at Estes Park. We were taking a few days off before heading to Rapid City, South Dakota to preach in a gospel meeting. Our house was in Port Arthur, Texas. One of the elders of the church called to tell me some bad news. My house had been broken into and ransacked. The freezer, where we had just put away a half cow worth of steaks, hamburgers and other meat had been stolen. Several other items had been taken as well. It’s a feeling of vulnerability. You feel violated when your home is trashed by thieves.

To make a long story short, when we returned home we purchased the things stolen, put locks on the doors, and felt more vigilant about our neighborhood watch program. But, while gone in my next gospel meeting, it happened again! It’s as if our home was under surveillance by these thieves, watching to see when we would be gone. Boom! We had been hit once more. As Winnie the Pooh would say, “Oh bother.”

Paul’s words in I Thessalonians 5 sure hit home and made us more vigilant. But it also brought to light a far worse scenario involving more than our property, but our souls.

*2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.
4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.
5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.
6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.*

The return of Christ will come “*as a thief in the night*.” Yet it will not necessarily come at night (after all, half the world will be in sunlight). The inference we take from this warning is that a thief works covertly, doing his deed when the owner least expects it. The old saying, “I didn’t see that coming” is the point.

Matthew 24 speaks of the sudden coming of the Roman army to destroy Jerusalem. Signs would be given by God to allow Christians to escape to the mountains to avoid capture and death. But then Christ uses that judgment scene to turn the hearers to another judgment that was far more serious. Yes, they would know the “*signs of the times*” regarding Rome’s arrival, but there would be no signs for Christ’s arrival.

*36 “****But of that day and hour******no one knows****, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. 37 But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 38 For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. 42* ***Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming****. 43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. 44 Therefore you also be ready,* ***for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect****.”*

I’ll never forget the first time I traveled to China to preach. I was on edge and extremely alert the entire month in that land that outlawed foreigners like me from teaching the Bible to the Chinese people. We felt watched the whole trip by the spies of government. We taught classes with the TV blasting to cover up our Bible studies, fearing our hotel rooms were bugged with listening devices. Cameras were everywhere.

While walking the streets we carried our passport and money in secure protective wallets inside our clothes, fearful of being picked. But then, finally, we had crossed the border into Hong Kong and I felt I could let down my guard. Big mistake. While in the airport to fly home I pulled out my wallet to buy a souvenir for my kids. I put it back in my pocket to pay the store clerk. Never felt it happen. That pick-pocket was incredibly good. Never even saw him. The thief knew his business. He knew just when to strike when my attention was elsewhere.

Jesus gives us fair-warning to never let down our guard. “*Watch, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming!... the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect*.” He even told the parable of the ten virgins to sound the same warning: *“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming*” (Matt. 25:13).

Why didn’t Jesus give us a timeline concerning His plans? Why didn’t He offer us the inside track on when He would return? Wouldn’t that be a blessing to know when He was coming? The obvious answer is, NO! Christianity is based on the principle of “*TODAY is the day of salvation*!” (2 Cor. 6:2). Like a good Boy Scout, our motto is, “Be prepared!” Christ knew all too well man’s tendency to procrastinate, to push the deadline for action to another day, to kick the can down the road.

When can we take off the armor of God and relax? The answer is found in Ephesians 6:10-18. Most stop reading at verse 17, but note the last verse: *18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit,* ***being watchful to this end with all perseverance*** *and supplication for all the saints*.” The Christian soldier can never take off his fatigues of war! Never!

Let us sing:
“Are you ready? Are you ready? Are you ready for the judgment day? Are you ready? Are you ready … For the judgment day?”

This is one thief I want to come to my house. I’ll welcome Him with open arms!

I love you. – Rick