

As a Thief—Watch—Be Ready

Sermon #1038

Study given by W. D. Frazee—November 13, 1954

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night"
2 Peter 3:10.

Jesus is coming very soon. But when He comes the world will not be expecting Him. He is coming as a thief in the night. Unexpected, unforeseen. Suddenly He will come to this world.

Christ in His discourse on the Mount of Olives compared the time of His coming to the days of Noah. Back there they went on eating and drinking and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood took them all away. So shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

Had they not heard that the flood was coming? Yes. What does it mean that they knew not? They didn't accept the message. It surprised them as fully as if they had not heard anything about it.

So it will be today. The mass of mankind will go on with their ordinary experiences, eating and drinking and marrying until the appearing of Jesus.

"Confusion fills the world, and a great terror is soon to come upon human beings. The end is very near. We who know the truth should be preparing for what is soon to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise"
Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, page 28.

What does overwhelming mean? If the dam should break, and those waters that are backed up for miles were released, what would it do? It would overwhelm us. So a sudden overwhelming surprise is coming upon this world.

John describes the picture of those who will be surprised at the coming of Jesus.

"And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"
Revelation 6:16-17.

Zephaniah describes the scene:

"The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD:

the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy: for He shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land" Zephaniah 1:14-18.

The coming of the Jesus will bring to the world sadness, gloom, sorrow, and disappointment. Why? Because they have sinned against the Lord. Sin makes men afraid of God. They are surprised and disappointed at His appearing.

Commenting on these Scriptures we have from the servant of the Lord the expression:

"The day of the Lord is approaching with stealthy tread; but the supposed great and wise men know not the signs of Christ's coming or of the end of the world. Iniquity abounds, and the love of many has waxed cold" *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, page 406.

Is it true that as far as the great men of this world is concerned few are looking for the coming of Jesus? It is true. Suppose they are planning how this world is going to go on, trying to avert the peril of the atom bomb. They look for things to roll along in a wonderful way. They are going to be surprised.

"There are thousands upon thousands, millions upon millions, who are now making their decision for eternal life or eternal death. The man who is wholly absorbed in his counting room, the man who finds pleasure at the gaming table, the man who loves to indulge perverted appetite, the amusement lover, the frequenters of the theater and the ballroom, put eternity out of their reckoning. The whole burden of their life is: What shall we eat? what shall we drink? and wherewithal shall we be clothed? They are not in the procession that is moving heavenward. They are led by the great apostate, and with him will be destroyed" *Ibid*, page 406-407.

That is a terrible picture of the multitudes following Satan. They are going to be destroyed with him.

"Unless we understand the importance of the moments that are swiftly passing into eternity, and make ready to stand in the great day of God, we shall be unfaithful stewards. The watchman is to know the time of night" *Ibid*.

Who is the watchman? Are you a watchman? Yes, each one of you has been appointed a watchman to watch what is coming, and tell others. Sound the alarm, give the cry. The watchman is to know the time of night.

"Everything is now clothed with a solemnity that all who believe the truth for this time should realize. They should act in reference to the day of God. The judgments of God are about to fall upon the world, and we need to be preparing for that great day.

"Our time is precious. We have but few, very few days of probation in which to make ready for the future, immortal life. We have no time to spend in haphazard movements

"The restraining Spirit of God is even now being withdrawn from the world. Hurricanes, storms, tempests, fire and flood, disasters by sea and land, follow each other in quick succession" *Ibid*, pages 407,408.

That was printed over fifty years ago. It sounds very up to date, doesn't it? Isn't that what we are seeing?

"Science seeks to explain all these. The signs thickening around us, telling of the near approach of the Son of God, are attributed to any other than the true cause. Men cannot discern the sentinel angels restraining the four winds that they shall not blow until the servants of God are sealed; but when God shall bid His angels loose the winds, there will be such a scene of strife as no pen can picture" *Ibid*.

What we are seeing is just the beginning. When the angels see that God's people are sealed, they will turn loose the winds, and there will be the awful time of trouble. The thought is that the world is going to be taken by surprise. The coming of Jesus will be like a thief in the night. But notice:

"But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of

the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.
Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch
and be sober" 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6.

Those who know what is coming are spoken of as the children of light. They are the ones who, when Jesus comes, will look up into the clouds of heaven and say, Lo, this is our God. We have waited for Him, and He will save us. You wait for someone you expect.

The people of God will be, and are now expecting the coming of Jesus. That is going to be a wonderful thing to be waiting for Jesus, and not be surprised at His appearing. What is He going to say to those who are waiting?

"Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand,
Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom
prepared for you from the foundation of the world"
Matthew 25:34.

What a wonderful scene it will be. The angels gathering the elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Matthew 24 describes that glorious appearing, and we are warned of some who will be saying in their hearts, My Lord delays His coming, and they begin to smite their servants and eat and drink with the drunken (verses 48-49). Commenting on this the Lord's messenger says:

"Some are looking too far off for the coming of the Lord.
Time has continued a few years longer than they
expected; therefore they think it may continue a few years
more, and in this way their minds are being led from
present truth, out after the world. In these things I saw
great danger" *Early Writings*, page 58.

Here is a red light. Let's see what the danger is. It is that we will look too far off for the coming of the Lord. Notice what gets people into that experience. They expect Jesus to come soon. They hear this message and think He is coming right away. Time goes on. As they look back on it they say, I expected Jesus to come twenty years ago, and He didn't. Time has gone on twenty years longer than I thought it would. Maybe it will go on for another twenty years.

In this the servant of the Lord saw great danger. Perhaps I can illustrate it. Suppose we see an old man ninety years old. He is tottering along with a cane. We comment on his age. We say to some of his children, Well, I don't suppose your father will be with you very much longer, will he?

They say, Yes, as far as I know he will. Twenty years ago we didn't think he would live very much longer. He wasn't feeling very good. But he has lived for twenty years now, and as far as we can see he will probably live for another twenty years.

Would you think that was good reasoning? No. The fact that he has lived twenty years longer than they expected, it is less likely that to believe that he is likely to live another twenty years.

That is the way we ought to look at the coming of Jesus. The fact that time has gone on so long means that however long it is, it cannot be very much longer.

Going back to Matthew let's notice the plea of Jesus:

"Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" Matthew 24:44.

When is He coming? In such an hour as you think not. Because of that He says to be ready. Do you know the way to be ready? Dear Elder Warren used to say, "The only way is to get ready and stay ready, and then you will be ready."

"And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged **with surfeiting, and drunkenness**, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" Luke 21:34-36.

Jesus mentioned here what may make people drowse and sleepy so that they are not awake when He comes. Surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life.

What does surfeiting mean? It means overeating. Eating rich food. Gluttony. What will it do to the spiritual senses? It will dull them, blunt them. It will put people to sleep. It actually does that.

Those things will cause the coming of Jesus to come to us as a thief in the night. So don't let those things make you sleepy. Watch and pray always that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things, and stand before the Son of man. Notice this comment from the Spirit of Prophecy:

"The end is near, stealing upon us stealthily, imperceptibly, like the noiseless approach of a thief in the night. May the Lord grant that we shall no longer sleep as do others, but that we shall watch and be sober. The truth is soon to triumph gloriously, and all who now choose to be laborers together with God will triumph with it. The time is short; the night soon cometh when no man can work. Let those who are rejoicing in the light of present truth now make haste to impart the truth to others. The Lord is inquiring: 'Whom shall I send?' Those who wish to sacrifice for the truth's sake are not to respond: 'Here am I; send me.'" *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, page 135.

Notice this earnest appeal from Elder Branson, who, for a number of years, led our world conference:

"Brethren and sisters of the Advent faith, how is it with you at this week of prayer season? Do you believe in your inmost soul that Jesus is coming very soon? And are you watching unto prayer for His appearing? Is His coming to you a blessed hope? Is your life being lived today entirely in harmony with your faith that soon, very soon, you are to see Him as He comes? Are you ready? If it were today, could you meet Him with faith and joy, and without fear?"

Those are important questions, aren't they?

If you could know that Jesus would appear
Before another morn should give its light?
Oh, would your heart be filled with joy or fear
If you could know that He would come tonight?

The things you do, the words you would say,
Perchance the letter you had thought to write;
How many plans would have to change today
If you were sure that Christ would come tonight?

How many acts would then remain undone?
How many wrongs would have to be made right
If you should meet Him 'ere another sun
And know for sure that He would come tonight?

How many things would you find time for then,
Now crowded out, or else forgotten quite?
The kindly deed, the hour of prayer again,
Would ought be different should He come tonight?

Some day that dawns will make all time as past,
Then may we keep our lamps all trimmed and bright;
Oh, may we live each day as it were the last,
And ready be if Christ should come tonight.

Yes, this is the attitude God wants us to have. If we really believe that Jesus is a mighty Savior, and we are fully surrendered to Him and given our sins to Him, and are pressing on to learn more of His ways and follow them, can't we rest in the assurance that He will have us ready? Oh, yes.

Again and again we have been told by the Master that we don't know just when He is coming. We know not the day nor the hour.

"Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" Mark 13:33, 37.

What is the key word in this warning? Watch. Can a man watch while he is sleeping? No. A watchman who goes to sleep is false to the trust given him. So Jesus says watch.

Then He compares Himself to a man who took a journey, left his house and gave authority to his servants, and commanded the porter to watch. He brings the lesson home to us that God is calling us to watch because we do not know when the Master of the house is coming. And instead of that being a reason for going on about our business, it is the other way around. Because we do not know exactly when He is coming, we must be ready when? All the time.

Jesus did not give us that warning to put us on tension. Not at all. He did it for this reason: The only way we can be ready to enjoy heaven and all eternity is to first learn in this world to be ready all the time.

If we knew that Jesus was coming next Wednesday and we would get on tension just to be ready, some of us would find ourselves unready before we ever arrived at the pearly gates.

Have we not again and again come to some time of appeal and consecrated our lives to the Lord, and given up some sin, and then found ourselves slipping back into that old life? God intends that we shall be drawn to get ready by the urgency and nearness of the end, and that we shall be kept ready by the sense of His love, and a desire to please Him.

We don't want to be like some children who get good just a few days after the middle of December. They have been told that Santa Clause comes with a great bag on his shoulder filled with all kinds of presents for who? Good children. So they want to be good. It is quite a strain. When Christmas is over they have stood it about as long as they can. They have the presents, and revert to the natural trend.

God does not want us to get on any such basis. He lets the time be uncertain in order that we may get into the experience of being ready all the time, and expecting to remain that way for all eternity. Therefore, it must be above and beyond tension.

If you had to hold your breath until something happened, you would want it to happen very soon, wouldn't you? If you had to hold you arm out until something happened, you would want it to happen pretty quick. And the idea about the coming of Jesus is, I wish somebody would tell me when He is coming so I could get ready a

few days before, and I think I could hold long enough. He would take me to heaven and I wouldn't have any more trouble.

That isn't the picture at all. Jesus is looking for those who develop steady, stable characters, that love righteousness because it is lovable, and who hate sin because it is ugly and cruel and wicked. When He gets those characters, He is going to put His stamp on them and come and take them.

We are given a wonderful story of a traveler who was touring Europe and went into the highlands of Switzerland. Close by a little lake he came suddenly upon some beautiful grounds with a lovely castle. Everything was kept in a beautiful way. The hedges were trimmed and the lawns cut.

As the traveler went into those grounds and looked around he was met by the gardener. The gardener showed him through the paths and the lovely flower beds.

Finally the traveler asked the gardener, "Is your master here the year around?"

"No, he is away," the gardener said.

"How long has he been gone?"

"About twenty years now."

The traveler said, "I suppose you hear from him often."

"Not once has he written me," the gardener answered.

"Who do you get your pay from then?"

"My master has an agent down here in the little town. I get my pay from him."

"Does the agent come up here to look around?"

"No, he has never been up here."

"Well, who does come to oversee this place?"

"It is seldom anybody comes up here. We are far off the beaten path."

The traveler looked at him in wonder. He said, "You mean to tell me you have kept these gardens for twenty years and never heard from the master, and his agent hasn't come? Everything looks as if you were expecting him tomorrow."

Back came the answer, "Not tomorrow, but today, sir. I keep everything as though he were coming today."

If a lonely gardener in the mountains of Switzerland can keep an old castle and its yards for twenty years ready every day, I believe we have every reason for

getting ready and keeping ready these hearts and lives of ours for the coming of the Son of man.

Oh, what a wonderful Savior we have. I trust we will enter into the spirit of prayer in our own hearts.

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