



Mark Lowenstein
Deaf Missions
Council Bluffs, Iowa

Series: The Model Church Series

Sermon: 4 of 4

Date: October 28, 2007

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

Every Christian ought to feel safe, secure and serene knowing that Christ will indeed come again. That was His promise to those who remain faithful to Him. We ought to be comforted by the facts and events of His coming soon, especially as it relates to loved ones who have died in the Lord and have gone home. 1 Thessalonians 4:16n-17 says, *"..the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."* Of course, the coming of Christ presumes that we are prepared for it. The questions that we need to ask are: Are we prepared? Will He find us ready when He comes? Will we be ready, if we die before He comes? Those are the questions we need to ask ourselves.

We are going to look at 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 of the American Sign Language Translation of the Bible:

"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."

As we come to the final lesson in Paul's first epistle to the church in Thessalonica, we find him telling how Christians were demonstrating "**Practical Christianity**" in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. Proper preparation for the coming of Jesus takes into account that...

HE SHALL COME AS A THIEF IN THE NIGHT (Verses 1-4)

"Thief" will happen for some, but not for others. The Lord's coming will be a surprise for many, as the *"thief in the night"* theme clearly indicates in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 and 2 Peter 3:10. But for those who heed the warnings of Scripture, the "Day" will not overtake them as a thief. Why? Because those who believe in Jesus are Christians and they will be ready for His coming, though we don't know when it will be and because they will have taken to heart the admonitions we shall consider momentarily.

This will happen for some, which is an inescapable destruction. Jesus will definitely come when people are saying *"Peace and safety!"* (1 Thessalonians 5:3) Do you know when a thief will break into your home? Do you sleep in when they break in? Or do you get your

gun armed and know that they will break in that night? No one really knows when. It could be tomorrow. It could be next week. It could be in a couple of months or even next year. But surely you don't know! Yet many Christians don't think that He is coming and seem to think He's coming only when there's a tribulation. No, it can be on the day when we are not expecting it to happen. If all is well, Christians will "take it easy" in their faith in God thinking it's a long way off, but our behavior and attitude must be alert and watchful starting now.

When He comes, it will be with "sudden destruction" (1 Thessalonians 5:3). Take careful note of Paul's word – sudden. It is similar to the when labor pains come upon a pregnant woman. And there will be no time or way to escape this destruction which is described in more detail in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10. But let me show you verse 10 in regards to this "Day" which will be one of glory for those who are ready, "*..on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.*" Paul the Apostle preached this and we need to believe like the church of Thessalonians believed. The "Day" is prepared for those who now are "asleep in Jesus", or are dead in the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:13-16), and for those prepared for His coming when He does descend.

Now, what will this "Day" mean for us, when the Lord comes "as a thief in the night"? You have two choices, to be in a day of destruction, or in a day of delight. Which one will you be in? It depends on where you stand in your Christian faith with God, where you stand in your relationship with Jesus Christ. It also depends upon whether we are prepared for His coming, and proper preparation means...

WE SHOULD LIVE AS SONS OF THE DAY (*Verses 5-11*)

It is important that we remain watchful and sober. Let's continue on into 1 Thessalonians 5:5, "You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness." We should not live in the darkness, but live in the light. Why should we live as "sons of the day"?

- Because we follow Jesus, the "light of the world" - John 8:12; 12:35-36
- Because we are now in Jesus, and walk in the light - Ephesians 5:8; 1 John 1:5-7
- Because we cast off works of darkness, letting go of any evil deeds we have done before, and seek to walk properly with the Lord - Romans 13:11-14

Therefore, we are to be watchful for His coming, 1 Thessalonians 5:6, "*So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.*" "Self-controlled" and "alert" both are important attitudes that we need to have. Let me give you a couple of examples showing a (self-controlled and alert) "watchful" attitude:

- For no one knows the day nor hour when Jesus will come, but be alert as you wait - 1 Thessalonians 5:2; Matthew 24:36, 42
- Watchfulness includes prayer. Many of us are feeble in prayer, following our feelings. We need to ignore our feelings and keep on praying and know that the Lord will come. And that we are prepared ourselves. - 1 Peter 4:7
- Watchfulness includes repentance. Repentance does not come once, but everyday as

we ask our Father for His forgiveness in what we lacked to do yesterday, today, and even tomorrow! From now and on, we need to continue our repentance. Then, that gives us the strengthening that we need - Revelation 3:2-3

On the other hand, "sleep" in our text refers to spiritual negligence. Are you "asleep"? Have you dozed off like the disciples of Jesus did in the garden even when Jesus asked them, *"Pray for me as the time comes near, pray for me."* They still fell asleep because they were physically exhausted (Luke 21:34-36). The Bible says that we are to be sober (1 Thessalonians 5:6-8a). The word "sober" means to be temperate or self-controlled, especially in regards to wine. With wine, you can become drunk when you drink too much because you haven't controlled yourself. In the same way, we should be self-controlled and alert in our lives to make sure that the devil will not trap you. This may take a lot of work, but it is well worth it.

We should certainly take the promise of Jesus' coming seriously, not lightheartedly. We need to be "armed and waiting". What a neat phrase. In all soberness (seriousness), put on "the armor of God" which is "...faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet." Faith and love protect our hearts from much evil as it bounces off our breastplate. Faith comes from the Word of God, and love comes from Him who is the Word (Romans 10:17; 1 John 3:16). And our hope of salvation protects our mind from much fear and doubt. Hope also comes from the word of God (Romans 15:4).

So we are encouraged to wait, even though many of us don't like to wait, but be patient and wait with watchfulness. Why? Because, in 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10, *"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."* The good news, very good news, is that He has appointed us to salvation through the blood of His Son (Romans 5:8-10). So that whether we are "awake or asleep" (live or die), we live together with Christ! Do I see an "Amen?!" Oh yeah, Amen! I said Amen! Because I am ready to eagerly wait and be excited about it. And I love to wait because it will be worth it. To have eternal life that waits for you.

Doesn't this give us the comfort we need to feel and be edified (encouraged) in faith? According to 1 Thessalonians 5:11, we need to polish and sharpen our swords, *"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."* I hope and pray that the church where you are in right now has brothers and sisters who are encouraging each other. If not, then you ought to consider this. All of you need to encourage each other and look on to Jesus. The primary work of the church is edification. In Ephesians 3, it describes many things about building up a church. There are many different gifts for building up the church, Ephesians 4:12b, 15-16, *"...for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up... ..Instead, speaking the truth in love... ..the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up..."* The body of Christ is like bones, muscles, vines, and blood working together to make the body become functional and strong. If one part of the body is dysfunctional, then the whole body will be dysfunctional. Read Ephesians 4:11-12, 15-16. This is an important passage of Scripture that shows us how we can build up as a church.

As I close with this lesson, I want to encourage churches all over the world to demonstrate

“practical Christianity”. “Practical Christianity” means PRACTICING CHRISTIANITY.

Here are a couple of questions to ask ourselves. Will we be prepared when Christ comes? Are we watchful? Are we serious about His coming? Are we putting on the armor of God or do you have the armor of God? With faith and love as a breastplate protecting our hearts? With the hope of salvation as a helmet protecting our minds? With faith and love to protect the heart and the hope of salvation protecting our minds, we need not become confused nor worry. For you have the hope! And you have eternal life stamped into your heart through the death of Jesus. As you look forward to leaving the world to bond with Jesus, Jesus tells you to wait for He will be back to receive you. To receive you and bring you to His Father where He lives now. Wow, when we take hold of Jesus and look into His eyes, His eyes will shine as well as his body. I don't know exactly what Jesus will look like. But I am looking forward to holding Jesus. I need you, churches, and other people to support and encourage me.

“Practical Christianity” cannot happen without diligent application of God's Word and active participation in the Lord's church. If you are not staying on the right path and not prepared, I ask you, “What for?!” And why?! It is time for repentance!

Have you lost your first love? Or neglected your first love? In Revelation 3:16, Jesus says, *“...neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”* But I warn all Christians in the world to repent and look at ourselves and realize that it is easy for us to fall away again.

That is why I am going to ask my final questions: “Have you been added by the Lord to His church? (Acts 2:41,47) Have you been baptized in the Lord? Have you received His forgiveness? Received the gift of the Holy Spirit? And are you continuing steadfastly in fellowship with a local church? (Acts 2:42) These are important questions.

If you are doing that, then praise God and bless you. If not, then I encourage you, like Paul encouraged the church of Thessalonians, to think about this because your life depends on this. And get Jesus back into your life.

Let's pray. Loving Father, we had four important lessons in all. These lessons show how important it is for us to become a model church, to become a model servant, to become a model brother and sister, and lastly we realize how important it is for us to demonstrate “practical Christianity”. We know that it is easy for Satan to drag us away as we became idle in our faith with God. I pray that You will be with all of those who are watching and me. And with those working for Deaf Missions. I pray that You will be with all people in the world and inspire them with the power of the Holy Spirit to lead them to the right way. And give us the love we need to love our enemies, family, and the church. I pray that people watching will review all what You have explained in the Bible again. Help us to grow closer to You, even if we are already close we want to be closer. To be in a deeper and deeper relationship with You. While we will be waiting for You, we will not be surprised when Jesus comes. We will be excited and ready to open our arms to receive You as You received us. We ask for Your blessing to be upon us. In Your Son's name, we pray. Amen.



©2007 Deaf Missions

This printed manuscript is the English translation of a sermon presented in American Sign Language.

The sermon may be viewed at www.linkasl.com. LINK is a ministry of Deaf Missions.

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permissions of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved. The "NIV" and "New International Version" trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society. Use of either trademark requires the permission of International Bible Society.

Deaf Missions, 21199 Greenview Road, Council Bluffs, Iowa 51503 • www.deafmissions.com