

## **How to Stop a Thief** by Pastor Kurt Hoover

### **Presence Litany adapted from 1 Chronicles 29**

**Pastor:** "Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of Israel

**All: our father, forever and ever.**

**Pastor:** Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty,

**All: for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours.**

**Pastor:** Yours is the kingdom, O Lord,

**All: and you are exalted as head above all.**

**Pastor:** We worship You Lord in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**All: Amen**

**Genesis 15:1-6** After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." <sup>2</sup> But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" <sup>3</sup> And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." <sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." <sup>5</sup> And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>6</sup> And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

**1 Thessalonians 5:1-11** Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup> For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup> For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not

of the night or of the darkness. <sup>6</sup> So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. <sup>7</sup> For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. <sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

**Luke 12:32-40** <sup>32</sup> "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. <sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

<sup>35</sup> "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, <sup>36</sup> and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. <sup>37</sup> Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. <sup>38</sup> If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! <sup>39</sup> But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. <sup>40</sup> You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

***<sup>32</sup> “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. - Luke 12:32***

**These are Jesus words for an anxious generation of his followers. These are Jesus words for the anxieties in us.**

**Jesus disciples, like us, want to be ready for some distant future event and Jesus uses the image of ‘being awake’ to help them see that not only will they never be ready, but that moment that they suppose might happen... it is already here.**

***<sup>32</sup> “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. - Luke 12:32***

**What are you anxious about? What future event gives you anxiety?**

**What is the moment, do you suppose, that the disciples are anxious about? When they hear Jesus say, ‘be ready,’ – what moment are they picturing being ready for?**

**When *we* hear this phrase we picture the day of Jesus return. Some event like a Rapture where the skys will split open and Jesus will judge the living and the dead. OR perhaps we are hoping that we will be ready, someday to die, and on that day be worthy of heaven.**

**When *we* hear, ‘be ready,’ we assume there is a chance we won’t be...Ready whenever our last day may come, or in the resurrection of the living and the dead.**

**We have this awkward notion that Jesus is giving us, and the disciples, time to prepare for something that is going to happen.**

**Jesus is not saying this. He says the opposite. He says resist that notion that you have time, because no one can anticipate the time when Jesus is going to show up in your life.**

**You hear my voice now and you will respond to what I have to say now, in the present. Don't take your boots off, don't stop and rest, don't put your lamp out, stay awake ... Stay with me here and now. God's Kingdom is not something that can be missed or in the future somehow. God's Kingdom is here and now.**

**God's Kingdom is where you treasure is.**

**There is a very interesting letter that Paul writes to the people of Thessalonica. Thessalonica is one of the innermost ports of Greece which Paul passed through several times on his missionary journeys.**

**In the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of his first letter to the believers *there* Paul uses this same imagery of 'being awake' that Jesus used. It is in the bulletin. I encourage you to read through it again. It almost seems as if Paul is contradicting Jesus.**

***<sup>9</sup> For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. – 1 Thess 5:9-10***

**Jesus died for you so that whether you are awake or asleep you may live with him.**

**This is very comforting to know that this is how the early church thought about our responsibility to stay awake. That is - that Jesus died for us so that if caught sleeping we are still**

worthy of him living with us, we are still worthy of the Kingdom.

It is comforting because the disciples are not good at staying awake. We as human beings seem almost incapable of doing so. In the Garden of Gethsemane, (Luke 22) the Transfiguration (Luke 9) and when Jesus goes to raise Lazarus from the dead Jesus says *"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him."* (John 11:11) If anything the Biblical narrative has nothing to do with our ability to stay awake, the Biblical Narrative seems to point to how good Jesus is at waking people up.

Which is what Jesus has to say to you this day.

I am here, I am present, you are awake and because of my presence you are actually of use to each other. I don't want you living in the past regretting mistakes or dwelling on wrongs. I don't want you in the future, preparing for some inevitability that you have no control over.

I want you here in the present, with your boots on, your lamp light, fully awake and present, available for each other.

Put the past in the past. Let tomorrow worry about itself. Live this day in my daily bread! Look at the sparrow. Look at the lilies of the field.

*(Luke 12:22-31) "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. <sup>23</sup> For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. <sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value*

***are you than the birds! <sup>25</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? <sup>26</sup> If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? <sup>27</sup> Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>28</sup> But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! <sup>29</sup> And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. <sup>30</sup> For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. <sup>31</sup> Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.***

***<sup>32</sup> "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.***

Let me conclude by saying this all another way.

**It is not your job to stop the thief! Because the thief is you! You have put your treasure in things to come, some security that will someday be yours when you have enough money or property or free time or stuff...**

**The thief is you! You have put your treasure in things of the past. Some idealic reality that you remember so much more fondly than it actually was... a reality that if you could just make that happen again, or get everyone to think and act like that again the world would finally be a better place...**

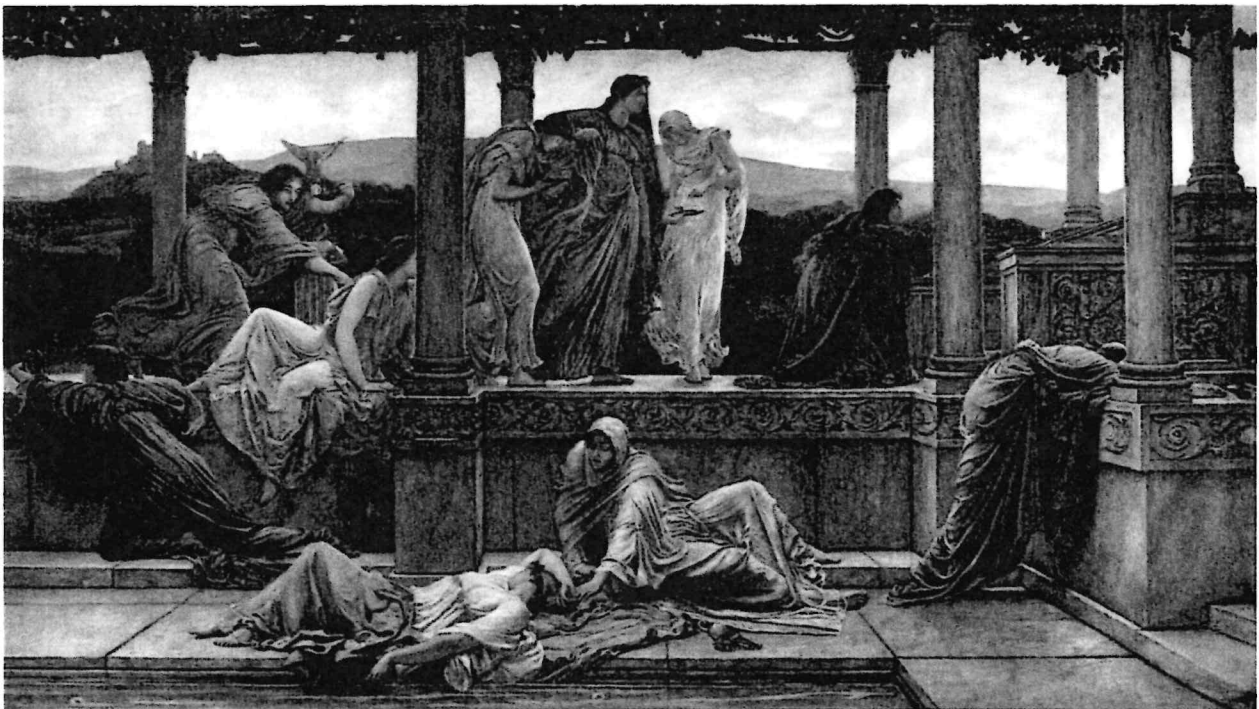


**The thief is you stuck in the past or dwelling on the future as the Kingdom of God unfolds all around you.**

**But thanks be to God there is another Thief. And you cannot prepare for the moments He enters your life and your heart and steals the idols of the past and future from you.**

**Jesus Christ at great cost to himself died that you might live in the present with him in his kingdom here and now (1 Thess 5:10). Where your treasure is there your heart is also. And Jesus Christ has promised to break into that Heart with His presence here and now and when you least expect it.**

*<sup>32</sup> “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”*



**Behold the Bridegroom Cometh,**  
Painted by Sir William Blake Richmond (1842-1921),  
Painted circa 1903,  
Oil on canvas

