

## Watch Out! – Revelation 16:15

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. *Foul Ball @ Fenway*

1. Some years ago I had an opportunity to attend a baseball game at Fenway Park in Boston
2. It's rather small park as far as big-league fields go, so they had constructed some extra seating that spread way down into the foul ball territory.
3. There's a rule spectators at baseball games are supposed to observe – and that is – Watch the game!
  - a. a foul ball can come off that bat at high speed and go just about anywhere
  - b. so you're supposed to watch the game – every pitch, to make sure one doesn't come flying at you and hit you unaware
4. Well, that's exactly what happened at that game.
  - a. we were sitting way out in the stands above left field
  - b. and all of a sudden, a foul came off the bat and went like a shot straight at those seats in foul territory, right in front of us.
  - c. there was a woman about a half dozen rows up who was sitting with her back to home plate, chatting with a friend
  - d. the ball hit her square in the back of the head, and she dropped like a rock!
  - e. several minutes later, a first aide crew arrived with a stretcher, they loaded her on and carried her out of the stadium.
5. Ever since that night, whenever I attend a baseball game – I make it a point to stay in tune with what taking place on the field.

#### B. *Watch Out!*

1. There's a warning that's repeated often in the Bible –“Watch out!”
2. Look with me here . . .

### II. TEXT

#### A. V. 15

**“Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed *is* he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked**

**and they see his shame.”**

1. As always, we need to understand this warning in its context so let me set the scene.
2. This exhortation from the Lord comes in the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> bowl of God’s wrath.
  - a. there are a total of 7 bowls that complete the judgments of God on a rebellious earth at the end of the Tribulation.
  - b. this 6<sup>th</sup> bowl is the set up for history’s last great Battle – Armageddon (Wed.)
  - c. so really, what we read in vs. 12-16 takes place immediately prior to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.
3. So in the midst of John’s description of the 6<sup>th</sup> bowl, as the Earth is being set up for Armageddon, which will culminate in the Return of Christ, Jesus Himself issues an urgent and solemn warning –

**“Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed *is* he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”**

4. The primary audience these words are addressed to are those Tribulation saints who’ve managed to escape the horrifying holocaust that will have been in effect for the previous 3 years.
5. As we’ve noted before – there will be millions of men and women who will come to faith in Christ after the Rapture of the Church.
  - a. the evidence of our disappearance,
  - b. combined with the dynamic witness of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists will be an effective one-two punch that we see the conversion of multitudes.
  - c. the testimony & miracles of the two witnesses mentioned in ch. 11 will be the icing on the cake.
  - d. many of these Tribulation saints will be martyred for their faith.
  - e. refusing to take the mark of the beast – they’ll be executed.
  - f. but there will be many who will *escape* this campaign of terror.
  - g. it’s to them these words are directed.
6. Imagine how precious the Bible will be to those surviving believers!
  - a. imagine how important *the Book of Revelation* will become to

- them.
- b. they'll meet in secret groups to pour over the pages of this text.
  - c. and they'll read these things, seeing their *literal fulfillment* in their own time.
  - d. they'll read about the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> bowls and know how they've been fulfilled.
    - 1) they'll know exactly what the sore on the worshippers of the antichrist looks like.
    - 2) they'll know precisely what the water turning to blood means.
    - 3) they'll know what the scorching of the sun *feels* like.
    - 4) and they'll witness the darkness that descends on the kingdom of the antichrist.
  - e. they'll read the words of ch. 16 here and be able to point to their specific fulfillment
  - f. and then they'll read these words from the Lord Himself –

**“Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”**

- 7. Jesus issues this promise and warning to His people precisely because of the pressure that will be brought on them to conform to the world.
  - a. this is only speculation on my part, but no doubt the antichrist and false prophet will offer *amnesty* to the saints;
  - b. after they've proven their earnestness by enforcing a policy of everyone taking the mark or being executed,
  - c. they then act all magnanimous and offer a reprieve and amnesty.
  - d. they tell people who've resisted taking the mark that for a limited time, they can come forward without fear of penalty and join the ranks of those who worship the beast.
- 8. Actually, we have an historical precedent for this very thing.
  - a. the early church father *Polycarp* was arrested by the Roman officials for teaching that the followers of Christ ought not worship Caesar.
  - b. he was found guilty and sentenced to death,
  - c. but the chief magistrate thought it unfortunate such an elderly and good man should be burnt at the stake.

- d. so he pleaded with Polycarp to recant
  - e. his challenge was simple as he offered Polycarp amnesty –
  - f. all he had to do was renounce Christ and say the formula, “Caesar is Lord!” and he would be set free.
  - g. Polycarp’s reply was determined – “For 86 years I have loved and served my Savior and never has He denied me. How can I deny Him now?”
  - h. with that the flames were lit in the kindling that had been piled at his feet.
9. Make no mistake, the pressure to conform that will be brought to bear on believers at the point we are reading about here in ch. 16 will be fierce!
  10. And that is why Jesus sends this word to them.
  11. I wonder who will pick up THIS Bible, and read these very words right here in that day and draw the strength they need to hold fast to Christ.

### **B. For Them**

1. Now, we might ask – if these words are for the Tribulation saints, why are we studying them this morning?
2. Good question – and the answer is that while these words *are* specifically aimed at the Tribulation saints, they’re also applicable to us, albeit in a far more *subtle* form.
3. As this promise and warning from the Lord applies to the Tribulation saints, it means that Jesus is about to appear in the Second Coming – so they need to be alert and aware - not lulled into a place of spiritual danger by the pressure around them.
4. But these words *apply to us* as well – for the simple reason that while we don’t anticipate the *Second Coming*, we do anticipate Christ’s imminent return for the Church in the Rapture.
5. And while we do not face the kind of persecution and pressure the Tribulation saints will know, we *do* face a more *subtle* form of pressure to conform to the world – it’s that *subtlety* that presents the greatest danger to us.

### **C. For Us**

1. Look at Jesus’s words here –  
**“Behold, I am coming as a thief.**

2. As we saw last week, the invitation to *behold* means to see something with the eyes of faith.
  - a. Jesus wants us to fix the vision of His coming firmly within our hearts.
  - b. we must never forget or lose sight of the fact that He could come for the Church at any moment.
3. As a pastor, a shepherd, I have a job to do – and that is to tend to the flock of God.
  - a. the shepherd leads the flock out into the pasture and makes sure they're well fed and tended.
  - b. he stands *watch* over them, protecting them from predators and danger.
  - c. but there comes a point at which he returns the flock to the owner.
  - d. the shepherd then gives account for each and every one of the sheep.
  - e. he wants to return with new lambs and with sheep whose coats are rich and full.
4. One day, when the Lord comes, I will give account to Him for you.
  - a. He expects this flock to grow, both numerically and in spiritual health.
  - b. that is my charge – my orders as a pastor.
  - c. and that is why I so often speak about the return of Christ; why I so often mention the Rapture.
  - d. I want to keep your destiny before you!
  - e. I want the vision of the Lord to be fresh in your heart and mind.
  - f. I know that if His soon coming is at the forefront of your thinking then it will go a long way in preparing you to be ready.
5. So, Jesus says – “Behold, I am coming as a thief.”
  - a. in Matthew 24:42-44, Jesus had said much the same thing
  - b. and in 1 Thess. 5:2-4, Paul says that the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night
  - c. but in both these passages, the “*coming as a thief*” flavor is not for believers – it’s how Jesus’s coming affects to *the world*.
  - d. while believers *will* be ready, the world won’t.
  - e. and like a thief, He will come *to take from them* what they are trying to keep = dominion of earth.
6. I love watching kids at the beach making elaborate sand castles.

- a. they start out far from the waterline, digging trenches and heaping up buckets of sand.
  - b. the more they work, the more into it they get till they forget where they are and the slow advance of the waves.
  - c. and right about the time they're putting the finishing touches on their masterpiece, a wave rushes up the beach, crashes over the little wall they've built around their castle, and the whole thing comes tumbling down.
  - d. what an apt picture of the kingdoms and people of this world.
    - 1) they're so caught up in building their own little lives
    - 2) they lose the awareness of the presence and reality of God
    - 3) they invest themselves in building their own little kingdom and forget that one day they will stand before Him.
    - 4) the day will dawn, as surely as the rising tide at the shore, when God will come and crash through the walls they've erected to hold Him at bay.
    - 5) and in a moment, their whole world will come tumbling down.
7. While the Lord's coming is as a thief to the world, it's not to His people, to those who are awake and waiting for Him.
- a. He only comes as a thief to the degree they've defined themselves by the world rather than their faith in Him.
  - b. and that's precisely the warning Jesus is giving here!
  - c. behold – Jesus is coming!
  - d. HOW we experience His coming is a reflection of where our heart is
    - 1) if our heart is in this world, then He comes as a thief.
    - 2) if our heart is securely in Christ, then He comes as Liberator, Redeemer, Savior, Hope & Glory.
8. When Lynn & I were courting, she flew up to visit where I was living in the Bay Area.
- a. I went to the airport to pick her up but her flight was a tad late.
  - b. so I stood in the little terminal there in San Jose and looked toward the sky past the end of the runway, anticipating her arrival.
  - c. I strained to catch the first glimpse of her plane – and finally there it was.
  - d. I got so excited, knowing that in just a few minutes of anxious

- waiting we'd see one another and embrace.
9. Set *that* story alongside this one:
    - a. Tom was married to Bev, but things weren't going real well between them.
    - b. Bev was a loyal and good wife, but Tom was restless.
    - c. one day he asked one of the women in the office to go to lunch with him.
    - d. it seemed innocent enough to him because *technically* he hadn't said or done anything that was clearly out of bounds.
    - e. but inwardly he held a kind of secret hope and desire that something might develop.
    - f. so sitting there at lunch, he was shocked when Bev walked into the restaurant, up to his table and asked him what he was doing out with another woman.
    - g. Tom's embarrassment was immediate and his sense of shame at what he had done intense!
  10. The Bible likens our relationship to God to a marriage.
    - a. we are the Bride of Christ – betrothed to Him through faith.
    - b. He's gone to prepare our wedding chamber – and now, like a pure chaste virgin, we simply await His return to gather us up into His arms and carry us across the threshold of heaven.
    - c. just as the Bible likens our relationship to God to marriage, so it sees any spiritual infidelity as *adultery*.
    - d. anything that competes with our affection for and devotion to Jesus is an intruder, a mistress, an illicit lover.
    - e. just as a husband or wife has the right to expect the complete and undivided affection of their mate, so God has the right to ours.
    - f. if any part or portion of our heart is given to the false loves of this world it is spiritual adultery.
  11. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus cautioned the people of His day against thinking of adultery as just the overt act of infidelity.
    - a. He made it clear that *sin is an issue of the heart* long before it's an action.
    - b. adultery begins when a man takes temptation and instead of battling it, *entertains* it.
    - c. when he dwells on the offer of pleasure the temptation suggests – *that* is adultery.

12. It's crucial we grasp this because it applies to what the Lord is saying here in v. 15.
- a. to His people He says, "Behold, I am coming as a thief."
  - b. when He comes, He comes *quickly and unexpectedly*.
  - c. so – when He comes, *how* will He find us:
    - 1) like a faithful bride standing at the airport looking to the sky waiting with eager anticipation and confidence for the arrival of her beloved?
    - 2) or like a wife caught at a meal with another man?
- 13 It's a question for our *hearts* to consider.
- a. we may be doing great in terms of our *behavior*
  - b. what I mean is – we may look like moral and good people -
  - c. but in our heart of hearts, are we in love with the world or the Lord?
  - d. are we building sand castles, oblivious to the approaching tide
  - e. or are we out in the water surfing: fully aware of the lateness of the hour and living for the Lord by making sure our hearts belong only and wholly to Him?

#### ***D. Blessed***

**Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.**

1. After the warning, Jesus gives a promise.
2. For those who are watching, His return won't come as a destructive surprise but as a longed for rescue.
3. In the days before burglar alarms, the only way to make sure your house was safe was by staying awake and keeping watch.
4. Jesus is saying that we must not be lulled to sleep by the seductive voices of this world.
5. We need to keep our spiritual vision keen and fixed on Christ.
6. Jesus paints an interesting picture here –
  - a. most people of that time had only one garment,
  - b. it was a large, one-piece sheet that covered the whole body by wrapping around one's self.
  - c. at night when going to bed, people would take this off and lay it aside.
  - d. if something happened suddenly in the night and they had to flee the house they were in, because putting on their garment



- took so long, they usually ended up running forth naked.
- e. to the Jewish mind, public nakedness was just about the *most* shame one could endure.
7. What Jesus is saying here is that His people are to be aware of the moment – and just as a homeowner would not disrobe and climb into bed if he knew a thief was coming that night, so we're to stay awake and clothed – ready for His coming.
  8. His coming is as a thief to the world – but not to us.
  9. If His coming *does* catch us unaware and unready, then we may know some shame and embarrassment.
  10. John makes reference to this as well in 1 John 2:28

**And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.**

11. John gives us here an important insight on how we can be watchful and ready for the Lord's coming – *abide* in Him.
  - a. live in Him, draw your source of life from Him.
  - b. as the branch abides in the vine and so draws it's life and strength, so we draw our life and strength by abiding in Christ.
12. Where do you draw your life from? Where does your strength come from? Who do you look to for the wisdom?
  - a. do you draw your ideas on what constitutes success from the world; from TV & magazines?
  - b. do you go for counsel to the wisdom of man?
13. Jesus said

**Blessed *is* he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.**

- a. which garment matters most to you this morning
- b. the robe or righteousness given to the saints?
- c. or the latest fashions in *Vogue* or *GQ*?

### **III. CONCLUSION**

#### **A. Kingdomly Correct**

1. It's fashionable today to tell people that it's fine to believe whatever you want, but keep it to yourself.
2. Religious faith has become a purely private thing; so much so in

- fact that it's supposed to have very little impact on one's behavior.
3. Those who *labor* to be politically correct just don't seem to get it that the Christian faith, Biblical faith, is something that isn't merely private – it's public.
    - a. it has a dramatic impact on *the way we live* and how we think.
    - b. and it places on us an *obligation* to make the truth known to others in a loving and winsome way.
    - c. to be a Christian and to be silent in the face of evil is really to deny Christ.
    - d. just the *lifestyle* of the Christian will stand as a loud message in and of itself, and the more so as society grows increasingly distant from the way of righteousness.
  4. As the followers of Christ, our aim is not to be politically correct but to be *kingdomly correct*.
  5. One day soon, our King will come and vindicate those who are boldly living for Him without apology.
  6. While the world is busy building sand castles on a beach that will soon experience an tsunami – we should be out in the water with our surf boards ready to ride the big one when it comes in.

## **B. Heart Check**

1. Just before special forces units go into action, they gather for what is called a *gut check*.
2. They look at each other, take a deep breath and center in on the reality of what they are about to do.
3. They're going in to harm's way and each and every guy needs to make sure he's mentally and emotionally ready to deal with what's about to come.
4. It's a *gut check* – do they have the guts, the courage, the spine to get the job done?
5. What Jesus says in v. 15 is a challenge to do a *heart check*.
6. As His people, are we mindful that we live in the middle of a battle zone?
  - a. in the last of the last days it will be all out and violent warfare, and Jesus tells His people to hold on – He's coming!
  - b. but these words apply to us today as well – for though the battle is more subtle, it is no less real.
  - c. the world isn't violent so much as it is seductive in its attempts

to capture our heart.

7. Is there any corner, any part of your heart that isn't surrendered to Christ?
  - a. is there some slumbering part of your heart that isn't ready for His return?
  - b. it's time for all of us to do a heart check –
  - c. because Jesus could come at any moment for the Church.