

A Clean, Well-Lighted Place

An Embassy for the Kingdom of God

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For those who like titles for sermons, I am going to defer this time until I have concluded the introduction and the specific purpose statement. To begin this message, I would like you to turn over to a number of related scriptures which we have heard a great deal about lately, not only in our own particular fellowship, but in similar messages throughout the greater Church of God.

Let us begin in I Thessalonians 5:4-8. I will use the Lockman Foundation's *Amplified Bible* for all the scriptures in this message.

I Thessalonians 5:4-8 But you are not in [given up to the power of] darkness, brethren, for that day to overtake you by surprise like a thief. For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we do not belong either to the night or to darkness. Accordingly then, let us not sleep, as the rest do, but let us keep wide awake (alert, watchful, cautious, and on our guard) and let us be sober (calm, collected, and circumspect). For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk, get drunk at night. But we belong to the day; therefore, let us be sober and put on the breastplate (corset) of faith and love and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

Romans 13:12-14 The night is far gone and the day is almost here. Let us then drop [flying away] the works {and} deeds of darkness and put on the [full] armor of light. Let us live {and} conduct ourselves honorably {and} becomingly as in the [open light of] day, not in reveling [carousing] and drunkenness, not in immorality and debauchery [sensuality and licentiousness], not in quarreling and jealousy. But clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ [the Messiah], and make no provision for [indulging] the flesh [put a stop to thinking about the evil cravings of your physical nature] to [gratify its] desires [lusts].

Now, we will turn to Matthew 24, the conclusion of the Olivet prophecy, in which Jesus commands vigilance and watchfulness in His servants.

Matthew 24:43-50 But understand this: had the householder known in what

A Clean, Well-Lighted Place by David F. Maas (<http://www.cgg.org>)

[part of the night, whether in a night or a morning] watch the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have allowed his house to be undermined and broken into. You also must be ready therefore, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him. Who then is the faithful, thoughtful, and wise servant, whom his master has put in charge of his household to give to the others the food and supplies at the proper time? Blessed (happy, fortunate, and to be envied) is that servant whom, when his master comes, he will find so doing. I solemnly declare to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that servant is wicked and says to himself, My master is delayed and is going to be gone a long time, And begins to beat his fellow servants [I might add there is more than one way to beat or harass our fellow servants] and to eat and drink with the drunken. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour of which he is not aware,

II Peter 3:10-11 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will vanish [pass away] with a thunderous crash, and the material] elements [of the universe] will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. Since all these things are thus in the process of being dissolved, what kind of person ought [each of] you to be [in the meanwhile] in consecrated and holy behavior and devout and godly qualities,

Over this immediate past month, I have been amazed at how God seems to be orchestrating the messages throughout the greater church of God, bringing home a theme in all around quadraphonic sound. For example, my friend Dave Havir gave a message in Big Sandy on January 17, 2015 titled "Watch and Pray," in which he insisted, in the context of Matthew 24:3-51, that although we have been given the charge of paying attention to events, we are admonished to pay special attention to our behavior, particularly our people skills, especially as we interface with other servants. Both (that is paying attention to events and emending our character) have their place. When we ponder world events, we should feel motivated to take prudent precautions, but we must avoid the toxic obsession of making a religion out of watching world events.

The continual negativity of world events over a lengthy period of time has an adverse effect on our nervous systems, hardening and enervating us, making us cynical and bitter, and, furthermore, does not help us to take control over our lives.

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Some have appointed themselves watchmen to warn others of impending prophetic events. I would add that others have attempted to establish litmus tests of doctrinal purity to bring the wayward heretics back on track. If we are consumed with negativity, we cannot reflect the positive aspect (peace, patience, tranquility, love, joy, and comfort) of the Kingdom of God. Dave Havis concluded that watching our behavior (encompassed in verses 42-51) focuses on preparing spiritually for Christ's Second Coming, an event for which we will not know the day or the hour. As children of light, we should not be overcome by darkness.

Appearing within the same month was an article by our own Pat Higgins in the latest issue of the Forerunner, titled "Watch What?" Pat maintained that some have been distracted by misapplying the concept of watching. In Luke 21:36 Jesus says, "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass and to stand before the Son of Man."

There are those who believe that this verse instructs us to watch world events and prophecy. Because of that, they spend much time on those subjects, believing they are properly preparing for the return of our Savior to this earth. We have seen that when Christ talks about watching it is all about spiritual preparation, not physical preparation.

What value would it be if, after countless hours spent in intensive study year after year, we were right about world events and prophecy (I might add perhaps getting a gold star for identifying the identity of the beast and the false prophet before anyone else does), but because of inattention we were wrong about the true state of our character. My friend Reg Killingley published an article in the Church of God Big Sandy column, titled "Watching does not mean Watching," focusing essentially on the same theme.

On January 15, 2015, Martin Collins, in his sermon "Death, or Not a Hair on your Head" added yet another dimension to this developing theme: Until Christ returns, we must serve our brethren, using the spiritual gifts God has given us, in direct contrast to the evil servant, who is careless, cruel, vengeful, and engages in carousing, believing he has plenty of time since Christ has supposedly delayed His coming.

For some reason, these continual references contrasting the evil servant to the faithful servant reminded me of a short story by Ernest Hemingway that I had frequently taught in American Literature, but up to now had never considered it symbolic of the dark, fearful events of the 1930's (the decade following World War I, the war to end all wars, and the events leading up to World War II, the war to really end all wars), the pivotal watershed year 1933, which Victorian writer Dickens might also have characterized as "the best and the worst of times, an age of wisdom and an age of foolishness, an epoch

A Clean, Well-Lighted Place by David F. Maas (<http://www.cgg.org>)
of belief, and an epoch of incredulity."

The short story "A Clean Well-lighted Place" takes place in a Spanish café sometime after World War I. Two unnamed waiters, one relatively young and one relatively old, a burned out veteran of World War I, are reacting to the behavior of a perennial client, also a veteran of World War I, deaf from the bombs and the gunfire of war, a client who night after night comes in to get out of the dark and drink his troubles away. It is nearly 3 a.m. in the morning, and the young waiter, who I would characterize as a hireling (or evil servant), anxious to get back home to his family, begins to abuse and insult the old man.

The older waiter (who I would characterize more as a shepherd or faithful servant more than a hireling) cautions the young waiter to have some compassion and feelings for this eccentric, yet dignified old man.

"I am of those who like to stay late at the café," the older waiter said, "with all those who do not want to go to bed. With all those who need a light for the night. Each night I am reluctant to close up because there may be someone who needs the café."

"Hombre, there are bodegas open all night long."

"You do not understand. This is a clean and pleasant café. It is well lighted. The light is very good and also, now, there are shadows of the leaves." [Alluding to the old man's deafness, he continues] "You do not want music. Certainly you do not want music. Nor can you stand before a bar with dignity, although that is all that is provided for these hours. What did he fear? It was not a fear or dread. It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing [I would add a profound sense of meaninglessness, a realization that his life has been vanity] and a man was a nothing too. It was only that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanness and order."

The barman looked at him but did not answer. It was too late at night for conversation.

"You want another *copita*?" the barman asked.

"No, thank you," said the waiter and went out.

A Clean, Well-Lighted Place by David F. Maas (<http://www.cgg.org>)

He disliked bars and bodegas. A clean, well-lighted café was a very different thing. Now, without thinking further, he would go home to his room. He would lie in the bed and finally, with daylight, he would go to sleep. After all, he said to himself, it's probably only insomnia. Many must have it.

Hemingway, often identified with the expatriate lost generation of the 1920's, was well aware of a deeply-sensed need for light, order, and peace in the wake of disillusioning conclusion of the war that was supposed to end all wars and as well, as the shattered illusion provided by nominal religion as he gives parodies of the rosary and the Lord's Prayer in a display of resigned bitterness.

Now, that I have just tied, or perhaps surpassed, Richard Ritenbaugh's record for the longest introduction, it is time for the SPS. 82 years have passed since Hemmingway penned this grim picture, and the world is still sitting in the profound darkness, with moral standards plummeting, threats of economic upheaval, and conspiracies that will make our hair turn gray. In addition, the fellowship with which we were previously attached has been torn asunder.

Thankfully, the spiritual organism into which we were placed is still intact. As called out members of the body of Christ, we have been commissioned as ambassadors of God's Kingdom, to maintain our family units as embassies of God's Kingdom – representing the wonderful World Tomorrow. As temples of God's Holy Spirit, we have been given the sacred responsibility to provide sanctuary, comfort, and stability in the midst of an uncertain world, helping those who are lost, hurt, or confused, continually helping their joy. Consequently, we must maintain a clean, well-lighted embassy for God's coming Kingdom. Therefore, the title of this sermon happens to be "Maintaining a Clean, Well-lighted Embassy for the Kingdom of God."

This past week, I did some time travel back to the year 1933, because that year was emblematic and exemplary of the kinds of metaphorical birth pangs that Christ warned us about in His Olivet Prophecy.

To acquire some perspective, I consulted several almanacs, did some time travel through You-tube, listening to and viewing all of FDR's fireside chats, Adolph Hitler's responses to FDR's chats, and many, many samples of popular entertainment throughout the 1930's via the Radio Archives project and even a few seasons of the BBC TV program "Foyle's War," attempting to derive some insight as to how people found sanctuary and light, relief from the Great Depression, the aftermath of World War I, and rumors of world wars to come.

I never experienced the Depression first hand, but the narratives from my mother (who was 12 in 1933) and my father (who was 16 in 1933) had their psyches permanently scarred from this horrendous event. As they related their experiences, my brothers and I felt that we had actually experienced the Great Depression, and our personalities became shaped accordingly.

Here are a tiny handful of salient events of 1933:

- January 3 - John Reid was three years old
- Jan 29 - German president Paul von Hindenburg appoints Adolf Hitler as chancellor
- Jan 30 - Hitler forms government, attempting to put Germany back to work and creating a national will.
- Jan 30 - "Lone Ranger" begins a 21-year run on ABC radio, giving young people a role model to bring justice to a lawless frontier.
- Feb 15 - President-elect Franklin Roosevelt survives assassination attempt.
- Feb 27 - German parliament building, Reichstag, destroyed by fire. [certainly, a well-lighted place, but not so clean perhaps]
- Mar 1 - Bank holidays declared in 6 states, to prevent run on banks.
- Mar 3 - Mount Rushmore dedicated—intended to serve as a clean and well-lighted place, intended to be a perpetual emblem of Democracy.
- Mar 4 - FDR inaugurated as 32nd president, pledges to pull US out of Depression & declares: "So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance. This was one of the most encouraging utterances to come out of the decade of the 30's perhaps one of the most encouraging of the 20th century."
- Mar 5 - FDR proclaims 10-day bank holiday
- Mar 12 - FDR conducts his 1st "fireside chat," the beginning of a series of 33 intimate, heart to heart talks to the American people in which he attempted to calm

A Clean, Well-Lighted Place by David F. Maas (<http://www.cgg.org>)

nerves, allay fears, encourage the frightened and confused, to clarify to the average citizen what was complicated, without talking down to them, and attempting to provide a clean, well-lighted refuge and sanctuary in a world plunged into darkness.

- Mar 20 - Dachau, 1st Nazi concentration camp, completed—adimly lighted place of darkness and horror not to be closed until April 29, 1945 when the US Seventh Army's 45th Infantry division liberated the facility. Sadly, since Roe vs. Wade, our own American government has permitted the murder of more innocent lives than Hitler and Stalin combined, attempting to conceal sins conceived in darkness, ostensibly in clean, well-lighted, sterile, and 'safe' abortion clinics.
- Apr 19 - FDR announces US will leave gold standard [allowing the federal reserve system to regulate currency and print money by fiat- the jury is still out on the outcome of that decision]
- May 18 - Tennessee Valley Act (TVA) Act signed by FDR, to build dams providing hydro-electric power and controlling floods]
- Jul 6 - 1st All Star Baseball Game: AL wins 4-2 at Comiskey Park, Chicago, Babe Ruth hits first All Star home run, providing a beacon of light to many wanna-bes
- Jul 20 - Vatican state secretary Pacelli (Pius XII) signs accord with Hitler
- Oct 9 - Herbert W. Armstrong secured a temporary 15-minute slot on KORE, Eugene, Oregon. – lighting a flickering candle metaphorically by getting on a tiny 100 watt radio station in Eugene Oregon, eventually to become an Ambassador without portfolio, representing the wonderful world tomorrow, eventually establishing three institutions beginning in 1947 with the purpose of turning out trained ambassadors for the Kingdom of God. The last institution closed in the summer of 1997, 50 years later.
- Oct 17 - Albert Einstein arrives in US, a refugee from Nazi Germany. His famous equation $E=mc^2$ eventually led to some Roman Candles going off in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, some well-lighted, but not too clean places. The careless application of his discoveries led to some dangerous meltdowns in Chernobyl and Japan, jeopardizing the food supply in the Pacific.
- November 2- John Ritenbaugh was one year old.

A Clean, Well-Lighted Place by David F. Maas (<http://www.cgg.org>)

- Nov 11 - "Great Black Blizzard" 1st great dust storm in Great Plains [creating a dark, dimly lighted place, providing the inspiration for Steinbeck's novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, which was published seven years later in April of 1939]

Strangely, over this past week, I have developed a kind of admiration for FDR—not for the political stance of his messages, but for a certain inspiring, godly, Christian-like quality that transcends politics, the same spirit which motivated Winston Churchill, calming the frayed nerves of the British citizenry during the dark days of the September 1940 London Blitz. a quality that ambassadors for God's coming kingdom should appropriate. Whether one agrees with FDR's policies or not, he had the ability to demonstrate empathy and compassion for people going through horrendous financial hardships, people fearful of losing their jobs, using the power of his office to encourage, motivate, inspire, and restore their dignity. Having been stricken with polio in 1921, at the age of 39, FDR was to develop a sincere compassion for those suffering and hurting.

Probably more meaningful to us as God's called-out ones, when reflecting on FDR's inaugural, was his somber statement: "These dark days will all be worth all they cost us if they teach us that our true destiny is not to be ministered unto but to minister to ourselves and our fellow men." These words, possibly deliberately alluding to Christ's admonition to his disciples in Matthew 20:25-26, remind them that the rulers of the Gentiles [arrogantly] lord it over them, and their great men hold them in subjection [tyrannizing over them], but that if any of them had any aspirations to greatness, they must function as humble servants.

The fireside messages, inspiring sacrifice and looking out for one another, evidently filtered down into the public psyche in the decade of the 1930's. Believe it or not, Hollywood, in large part, in the 1930's served as a beacon of light [a clean, well-lighted place] with a didactic mission of safeguarding and defending the public morals. From *The Shadow*, *Philip Marlowe*, *Nero Wolfe*, *Charlie Chan*, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, and *The Challenge of the Yukon*, the perennial theme drummed into young people was that crime will never pay.

The B-Westerns, featuring John Wayne, Gene Autry, Hop-a-long Cassidy, Bob Steele, Ken Maynard, Hoot Gibson, and William S Hart, all provided enclaves of stability during times of financial hardship and dreadful rumors of war during the 30s. In the words of Eddie Cantor, "The message of self-sacrifice and concern for the abused was an integral part of the western formula. Long before World War II, it was employed explicitly as a counterforce to the oppressive social and political problems of the Great

A Clean, Well-Lighted Place by David F. Maas (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Depression. In a guest appearance on June 5, 1933, on the NBC variety program, Hollywood on the Air, Buck Jones spoke to the youth of America and tied together the western ethic and the role of children in combating the stresses facing the nation. In this remarkable speech, only a partial recording of which exists today, Jones called upon his Rangers—his fans who believed in "Americanism, good fellowship, and helpfulness"—to come to the rescue of the nation.

Probably the best indicator of the moral pulse of the nation was the weekly radio program, Dr. Christian, the saga of generous, kind, self-sacrificing, country doctor, located in Rivers End, somewhere in the heart of upper Midwest America. It was the only program in which the audience wrote the scripts, collectively building, molding, and shaping an ideal character, a character who exuded trust by his continual self-sacrificing humanitarian behaviors. If our country had a couple thousand Dr. Christians, we would have no need of Medicare, Obamacare, or Blue Cross Blue Shield. Dr. Christian was played by Danish American actor Jean Hersholt, who was also instrumental in translating the works of Hans Christian Anderson into English and who set up a foundation honoring humanitarian contributions. As the theme music launched the program (a theater organ rendition of the happy optimistic song from the 1927 movie, "Rainbow on the River"), Art Gilmore, who also introduced the World Tomorrow Program, introduced Dr. Christian's kindly exploits.

We have progressed 82 years since the dialogue between the young hireling waiter and the old shepherd-like waiter recorded in Hemmingway's "A Clean Well-lighted Place" and FDR's series of "fireside chats." The war to end all wars and the war to really end all wars did not really end any wars. Increasing the size of government did not really make Democracy safer from becoming a totalitarian dictatorship. Hitler and Stalin thought they could make their countries secure and prosperous by establishing police states and dictatorships. FDR believed that expanding the size of government would protect the American citizenry against unscrupulous private institutions which would exploit them.

As the size of government seemed to loom out of control, some leaders, including Ronald Wilson Reagan, believed that the greater danger to the citizenry was an unchecked, unregulated government. Our current government believes that the way to transform this country is to redistribute the wealth through confiscatory taxes and regulations, as well as declaring illegal immigration legal through blanket amnesty, making borders and laws irrelevant.

All of these man-made attempts at transformation, whether we have a highly regulated economic system, or a *laissez faire* economic system, a police state, a democracy, or

A Clean, Well-Lighted Place by David F. Maas (<http://www.cgg.org>)

anarchy, really are quite futile unless the heart of man is transformed and we become transformed into the image of the real light of the world, bringing comfort and security to those sitting in darkness.

It is February 7, 2015, and Christ has not returned. The Ambassador without portfolio has been in the grave for 29 years. I remember attending his funeral in Altadena, standing next to about a dozen Buddhist monks clad in bright orange. Those of us who were influenced by his work still have the obligation to serve as Ambassadors, keeping a clean, well-lit embassy.

As the collective bride of Christ, we have the job of “keeping the home fires burning” waiting for our Warrior to return [much the same as the British housewives during World War I promised their husbands as they marched off into harm’s way]. Part of our job has been described in Proverbs 31.

Proverbs 31:15, 18 She rises while it is yet night and gets [spiritual] food for her household and assigns her maids their tasks. She tastes and sees that her gain from work [with and for God] is good; her lamp goes not out, but it burns on continually through the night [of trouble, privation, or sorrow, warning away fear, doubt, and distrust].

We read in Proverbs 6:23, “The commandment is a lamp, and the whole teaching [of the law] is light, and reproofs of discipline are the way of life.” We will become a lamp unto other people’s feet when we quietly model God’s Law in our lives by exemplifying the fruits of God’s Holy Spirit on a day by day, hourly, minute by minute basis—something which we are still struggling to learn.

When God called us—20,30, 40, 50, 60, or 70 years ago—He planted in us, the temple of His Holy Spirit, some sapling fruit trees in our embassy garden [Galatians 5:22-love, joy (gladness), peace, patience (an even temper, forbearance), kindness, goodness (benevolence), faithfulness], and self-control.] If they have been cultivated properly, they should be bearing fruit by now, providing a peaceful arbor to nourish and strengthen others who seek refuge, sanctuary, and comfort. Until Jesus Christ returns, we are obligated to maintain a clean, well-lighted embassy.