

## WATCHFULNESS.

– APRIL 21, MATT. 24:42-51; MARK 13:32-37; LUKE 21:34-36. –

**Golden Text – "Take ye heed, watch and pray."**

NEARLY nineteen centuries have passed since our Lord instructed his disciples to watch for his second coming, saying, "Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matt. 24:42); and to make sure that the whole Church to the end of the age should feel this command incumbent upon them, he added, "And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch!" – Mark 13:37.

Again he said, "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.... Be ye therefore ready also, for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not. Let your loins be girded about and your lights burning." – Luke 12:35-40.

That the early Church lived in joyful anticipation of this longed-for event is manifest from many scriptures. (See 1 John 2:18; 2 Tim. 2:18; 2 Thes. 2:1-5.) And when the Apostle Paul had about finished his course, he looked forward to this event as the culmination of his own and the whole Church's hope, saying, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing." (2 Tim. 4:8.) To them the appearing of the Lord was the consummation of their hopes, and their one concern was to be found approved of him at his appearing.

But how is it to-day? Alas! professed Christians have generally forgotten to watch for his appearing. They seem to have concluded that

the watching will never be rewarded, and that the time of his advent will never be revealed. Its object – the establishment of his Kingdom, the exaltation of the Church and the blessing of the world – has been overlooked and also nullified by erroneous doctrines which have been accepted and which have subverted the truth.

In this state of mind and under the delusions of various errors, they have concluded that it is wrong to study prophetic time with a view to a knowledge of the time of the Lord's return, and to this effect quote the Lord's words – "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power." (Acts 1:7.) Yes, we reply, and he also said, "Of that day and hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." – Mark 13:32.

But is it reasonable to conclude that neither the Lord's people, nor the angels, nor yet the Son of God, would ever know the times and seasons of God's appointment? Certainly **[R1796 : page 88]** not. Because the time was long according to human reckoning, and a knowledge of it would therefore have been discouraging, it was wisely kept secret, not only from the Church, but also, and for the same reason, from angels and even from our Lord Jesus while in the flesh, and must continue so until the proximity of the event renders the knowledge of the time no longer a cause of discouragement, but, on the contrary, of the revival of hope and anticipation. The Lord surely knew about it after his resurrection when all power in heaven and in earth was given unto him – when there was in such knowledge no longer any cause of discouragement to him, the cross-bearing having ended and the glory begun. And it was to the intent that the Lord's people might know when God would see fit to reveal his times and seasons, that the waiting Church was told to watch.

The injunction to watch implies not only some advantage in watching, but also that the manner of the Lord's second advent might be so contrary to the general expectation as to require some

discernment on the part of the watchers. The advantages of watching have been to keep fresh in mind the inspiring hope of the Church – the reunion with Christ in glory, the reign with him in his kingdom, and the privilege of cooperating with him in the blessing of all the families of earth, and to keep the heart in love and harmony with the Lord and his work. Thus, at his coming, the watchers would be found in readiness to sit down to meat and be served by the Lord, who himself would make known to them the secret of his presence. As at the first advent he was present some time before his presence was declared and recognized, so at his second advent his presence, which was due in 1874, only began to be recognized subsequently as he drew the attention of the watchers to it through the Word of truth.

It is the mistake of those laboring under the delusions of various popular errors, to think that they must watch for the appearance of the Lord again in the flesh, in the body of his humiliation, to see him descend from heaven in the literal clouds, and to hear the blast of a literal trumpet announcing his presence. But those who watch unto "the sure word of prophecy, which shineth as a light in a dark place," know that "though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him [so] no more;" that the clouds in which he comes are the clouds of trouble predicted by the prophets (See Dan. 7:13,14; 12:1; Matt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7); and that the trumpet sound is the sound of "the last trump," "the trump of God," "the seventh trumpet," whose sounding is in the momentous events of this day of the Lord, just as the preceding six were sounded in other historic events; for if, as all admit, the first six trumpets were so sounded, why should we indulge the unreasonable idea that the seventh will be a blast on the air? \* Those who have been watching thus unto **[R1797 : page 88]** the sure word of prophecy, and who have also been watching unto prayer and thus keeping their hearts in a humble teachable attitude, have been and are being made to sit down to meat at the Master's table, to realize his presence, and in his light to read with unclouded vision the wonderful working of the divine plan of the ages and to see the duties and privileges of the hour.

\*For treatment of this subject see MILLENNIAL DAWN, VOL. II.\*

Verses 44-46 show who will meet the Master's approval in this day of his presence. They will be, not only those who believe in him, but who also manifest their faith and love in active service – "Blessed is that *servant*." It is not enough, however, that they be servants of the Lord; for many serve very actively whose works are to be burned in the fiery trials to which they shall be subjected in this day of the Lord (1 Cor. 3:12-15); but they must be wise and faithful servants – servants who study to show themselves approved unto God, rightly dividing the Word of truth, servants who are anxious, not only about the amount of their service, but also that it shall be in exact cooperation with God, directed by his Word and controlled by its principles, and then faithfully performed, with an eye single to his glory.

"Blessed is that servant whom his lord at his coming shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you that he will appoint him over all his possessions." The whole storehouse of divine truth shall be open to such to be ministered by them to others of the household of faith. This is the present reward of the wise and faithful servants in the time of his presence, and thus they begin to enter into the joy of their Lord now – the joy of being taken into full confidence with God, of comprehending his deep and wide designs and cooperating with them (Luke 12:37); but the fulness of their joy will be when they pass beyond the vail of the flesh and are made like him and see him as he is. – 1 John 3:2.

Verses 48,49 are a solemn warning to those who are thus blessed against a possible falling away from even such a favored condition. As long as we are in the flesh, we will have to war against its sinful proclivities. With the increase of knowledge pride may reassert itself or arrogate to self the honor of finding out God by searching, and, to a considerable extent losing sight of the great reward of faithfulness at the end of the present pathway of humiliation and sacrifice, seek to gratify present fleshly ambitions with the prestige gained by the knowledge of the truth. Such a one virtually says *in his heart*, "My Lord delayeth his coming" – the coming in the glory of his Kingdom,

his personal presence being already recognized. That is the language of such conduct, whether it find expression in words or not; and then follow the unseemly acts to which pride, ambition and self-righteousness stimulate: – he begins to smite his fellow-servants (to act tyrannically over those who are faithful and, generally, because they are faithful), and to eat and drink with the drunken (to imbibe more and more of the spirit of the world, the spirit of selfishness, and to become intoxicated with it). Thus tyranny and selfishness go hand in hand, as in the notable instance of the inquisitions and indulgences in the Church of Rome. The only proper course for the Lord's\* people at any time is to have "no confidence in the flesh," and to watch against its old ambitions under all circumstances, and to pray, lest we enter into temptation.

\*See our issue of July 1, '94, page 217.\*

Verses 50,51. The penalty of falling away from such high privileges, and that in the face of a knowledge of the Lord's presence and the very near approach of his Kingdom and glory, is, as might well be surmised, a severe one – a penalty which such a one must shortly realize, when, in the overwhelming trouble that shall ere long put an end to all human ambitions, he comes to his sober senses and realizes that he has sold his birthright and is cut off from his former position in the body of Christ and appointed a portion with the hypocrites in the great tribulation with which this harvest period closes. God forbid that any of those at present rejoicing in the truth should thus fall away, now when the Kingdom and its glory are so near. Yet it behooves all to watch and pray lest we enter into temptation.

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