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THE DUTY OF WATCHFULNESS.

– *MAY 15. – MATT. 24:42-51. –*

"Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."
– Matt. 24:42.

THIS injunction followed our Lord's great prophecy of the events of the Gospel age, recorded in Matt. 24 and Luke 17 and 21. It is not an exhortation to watch the sky in hope of seeing our Lord's second coming, as some seem to understand it. On the contrary, our Lord had just explained that "in the days of" his second presence the world in general would be eating and drinking, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage, and know not of his presence. He had told them that in the time of his presence his people would be gathered from the field, the mill and the bed, to the food of present truth which he would supply; and that if at that time anyone should say to them, Lo here! or Lo there! Lo, he is in the secret chambers, or in the desert, they should believe it not, nor seek to see him thus, because the signs or evidences of his presence would not be secret ones, but would be manifest to all, as is the light of the morning sun.*

*See MILLENNIAL DAWN, VOL. II., Chap. 5, and VOL. IV., Chap. 12.

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It is proper, also, to call attention to the fact that nothing whatever in the text, nor in the context, has the slightest reference to watching for death; such a statement is only justified by the fact that very many are inclined to give this very unreasonable meaning to the Master's words. Death is not our Lord, but, on the contrary, the great enemy – the "last enemy that shall be destroyed." – 1 Cor. 15:26.

We are to watch the signs of the times, so carefully delineated by our Lord in the prophecy which precedes this exhortation to watchfulness. The tendency of the world, the flesh and the devil is to

absorb our time, thought, interest and affections in worldly affairs, eating, drinking, marrying, building, planting, business, pleasure, sectarianism, and cunningly devised fables. Our Lord presents to us, as an *antidote* to these prevailing influences, first of all the thought that he is coming a second time, to receive us unto himself, to associate us with him in his Kingdom, and to employ us then in the great work of blessing all the families of the earth: secondly, by the prophetic delineation of the conditions that would prevail in the interim of our waiting he sought to divert our thoughts from the worldly conditions, and to give us therein something which would help to hold and fix our thoughts and affections and interests on higher things, and thus help to hold our interest and to have us always ready. It is thoroughly absurd, however, to claim that the multitudinous *signs* of our Lord's prophecy are to be studiously ignored by the watchers. Such as give no heed to the "more sure word of prophecy" are not watching and will not know.

Hence, we conclude that the meaning of this exhortation, "Watch therefore," is that the Lord's people should be keeping note of the fact of his coming, and of the various incidents of the interim; not knowing how rapidly they might culminate, might ever live in the attitude of expectancy, and of readiness for his presence. This would imply, not readiness in a literal ascension robe, but readiness in a figurative ascension robe, namely, such a condition of heart and life as would be in readiness to welcome the Lord, and his scrutiny of our hearts and conduct; and efforts to copy his character and to serve his cause every moment. The tendency of things of the earth is to lull us to sleep along the lines of self-control and spiritual activity in the Lord's service, and Watching signifies to keep awake, to be on the alert, to be energetic. Those who have tried it can attest, that nothing is more helpful to wakefulness and energy in the Lord's service than the thought of his coming, and the examination of the prophecies which were given us with the very object of having us know something about the time of his coming, so that we should not be in darkness with the world, nor be overtaken by the day of the Lord as by a thief, unawares, as it will overtake the whole world.

This significance of the injunction to watchfulness is borne out by the subsequent exhortation in the form of a parable. Our Lord represents the world of mankind as a household, whose head or chief is the "Prince of this world," Satan, whose house is to be broken up in the great time of trouble with which this age shall end and the new age be introduced. If the world were aware of the time of the Lord's coming, and of the great dispensational changes then due, it would order its affairs differently, even tho its heart were not different from at present; hence it is that these things are spoken of in parables and "dark sayings," that worldly people may hear and not understand, and see and not believe at the present time, and so the day of the Lord will come upon them as a thief in the night, and as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape it. But ye, brethren, – all the faithful in Christ Jesus, who wait for his Kingdom and watch thereunto and seek to be prepared for it – ye will not be left in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Watch! Not that you may be deceived and know no more about the matter than the world which does not watch, but watch so that when the time does come you may know of it. – Compare 1 Thess. 5:1-9.

Luke says (12:41) that Peter inquired whether or not this necessity for watching was applicable to the apostles merely, or to all? Our Lord's answer is in the nature of a question, which implies that during this Gospel age it would be his method to make use of certain agents or agencies in the presentation of dispensational truth. He inquires, Who then, at that time – at the time of the second presence of the Lord – is the faithful and prudent servant whom his master has placed over his household to give them food in due season? Who will it be? Whoever will occupy that position, happy will it be for him, if the Master, on coming, shall find him thus employed – diligent in his service of the household, dispensing meat in due season to the household of faith. If that servant shall continue faithful during the trials of the day of the presence, he will be continued at his post of service, and used as a channel for the dissemination of all the riches of grace and truth which will continue to be due to the household of faith. But should he lose his

faith in the Master's presence, become arrogant and tyrannical to his fellow-servants, and intemperate in his words and deeds, the Master will be present nevertheless [his loss of faith in the presence will not change the fact], and he will be cut off from the office of steward, and separated from the household of faith entirely, and will [R2303 : page 141] have his portion with the hypocrites, – altho he was not one of the hypocrites but an unfaithful servant.

To have his portion with the hypocrites implies that he will share with them the great time of trouble which will follow the gathering together of the Lord's elect – the time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation, represented by the expression, "wailing and gnashing of teeth." – Matt. 24:51; 13:42.

This answer to Peter's question, while it gives a particular prophecy respecting the Lord's dealing in the end of this age, gives also a suggestive hint to all who might be special servants or fellow-servants, that the greater and more important their service, the greater will be their responsibility to the Master.
