

WATCHING AND ITS REWARD.

– LUKE 12:35-46. – SEPT. 23. –

GOLDEN TEXT: – "*Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.*" – Matt. 26:41.

PRAYER IS GOOD; it is absolutely indispensable to Christian life. It means, not only a living faith, but a growing faith. Experience will prove that neglect of either private prayer (Matt. 6:6) or prayer in the congregation of the Lord's people (Acts 12:12; 1:14; 16:13; 1 Cor. 11:4,5; 14:13,14) is sure to lead to leanness of soul and lukewarmness in respect to spiritual things – unfaithfulness, coldness, death. On the contrary, communion with the Lord in prayer brings increased confidence in the Lord's supervision of our affairs; increased faith in all the exceeding great and precious promises of his Word; increased realization of his leadings, past and present; increased love for all the brethren of Christ, and increased solicitude for their welfare and spiritual progress. Prayer is thus closely and actively identified with progress in spiritual things, progress in the fruits of the spirit, toward God, the brethren, and all men.

Our Golden Text suggests, however, that more than praying is necessary. Praying that does not fully represent the sentiments of the heart is apt very quickly to degenerate into a mere form of words – drawing nigh to the Lord with the lips while the heart is far from him, – perhaps enwrapped in business or pleasure or sin. Whoever, therefore, would make progress in the spiritual way must not only pray with the spirit and with the understanding, but he must also watch – against the sinful tendencies of his own flesh – *self*-gratification, selfishness; also against the allurements of the world toward so-called worldly pleasures, worldly ambitions, honor amongst men, the love of money, etc.; also against the wiles of the Adversary, whose deceitful attacks usually come upon the Lord's people as "an angel of light" – to deceive them into forms and ceremonies of Churchianity, substituting

before the mind and affections and consecrated intentions, human sentiments and methods and works and objectives, as instead of "the hope set before us in the Gospel" (Col. 1:23) and its various exceeding great and precious promises, by whose incentive the Lord has called us to walk and to run, by faith and not by sight, following in the footsteps of our Redeemer.

Our lesson itself deals particularly with the watching; but in harmony with the Golden Text we know that all true watchers must also be prayers, and that all fervent prayers will also be watchers. Prayer represents the faith; watching represents the works which must accompany it, so long as it is a living faith; for, as the Apostle declares, Faith without works is dead – it speedily loses its vitality, its value, its very existence.

Our Lord gave a parable, as was his custom in teaching, to illustrate this lesson of the necessity for watchfulness.

A wealthy householder is represented as absent for a considerable portion of the night at a wedding-feast, and expecting on his return that the servants of the household would be awake and alert to receive him and any company he might bring with him. It was expected of such servants that they would not only not retire to bed, but that they would not even get drowsy. To give their master a proper reception they should be thoroughly awake, quick to hear and to respond to his knock, and to "open unto him immediately." Hence, in the parable, such servants are represented as having their loins girt about and their lamps burning brightly. The custom of Orientals at that time was to wear long, loose, flowing robes. These, when they were resting, were loosened at the girdle, but when attending to business they were drawn tightly at the waist with a girdle or belt, preventing them from interfering with proper service. Lamps, which were the mode of illumination, were also necessary in the night, and should not be permitted to grow dim, but be trimmed as necessity required.

Our Lord points out that such faithful servants would be appreciated by their master, and that he would give them a reward – he would honor them by treating them as his friends, and bring forth to them of the good things from his pantry. He would indeed gird himself as a servant and serve these faithful ones: and for the master of the house to do this would imply the bringing forth of the very best that he possessed. But in order to fulfil the conditions and be thus acceptable to their master they must be ready in whatever hour of the night he might come.

The parable, without question, refers to the second coming of our Lord Jesus, and points out to all of his faithful servants the proper attitude of watchfulness and preparation to receive him at whatever time his second advent should occur. It also indicates that it was the Lord's good pleasure not to reveal definitely and positively to his people when to expect his arrival, but rather that all the way down through this night-time which we designate the Gospel age, and which must necessarily precede the morning of the Millennial day, they should be continually awake, alert, waiting for him, ready to receive him at any moment. They should have the loins of their minds girt up and be active in thought, in word and in deed, in every matter pertaining to the Master's service, that they might be approved of him; – the lamp of the divine Word, so necessary to their enlightenment, should be with them, and well supplied with the oil of the holy spirit – and well trimmed, in the sense of rightly dividing the word of truth, and seeking to understand through it their proper attitude of heart and conduct, to be pleasing to their Master. **[R2692 : page 269]**

The parable is a very simple one, and could scarcely be misapprehended by the class for whom all parables are intended – the consecrated Church. These realize at once that the central thought with them, as the Lord's servants, must be such readiness of heart and mind and character as will be pleasing to the Master when he shall come to gather his "jewels," – his watching, faithful servants. This thought of the return of the Lord, and of the blessings which he has promised to

his faithful ones at that time, is the great incentive set before the called ones of this Gospel age. It is for the Master's favor and the consequent exaltation with him to a share in his Kingdom, then to be established, and a share in the great work of blessing the world of mankind, then to be accomplished, that all of the saints are seeking, watching, praying, striving.

Well has the Apostle said, "He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he [the looked-for Master] is pure." It is this hope that leads the faithful servants continually to the lamp of the divine Word, to trim it and to thereby keep themselves thoroughly awake, quick of ear and quick of eye in respect to any and every thing relating to the will of the expected Master, and such conditions of heart-purity and robes of righteousness as would be pleasing and acceptable in his sight at his arrival.

Let all watchers fully appreciate this parable, and be on guard against every ensnarement of the Adversary, and against the stupefying influence of the world and its spirit, and against the selfishness and weaknesses of his own flesh; and let each put on the graces of the spirit, and assist his fellow-servants in these preparations, that thus an entrance may be ministered to him into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. – 2 Pet. 1:4-12.

What great blindness and spiritual stupor respecting so simple a parable is manifested by many who are regarded as teachers in nominal Zion, in respect to this lesson! Note the interpretation of it offered by one of the leading "Helps to Sunday School teachers." The writer evidently is not *so* blind as to fail to see that the parable relates in some manner to the second coming of our Lord; but he *is* so blinded by misconceptions, [R2693 : page 269] false doctrines, etc., as to give the following as an explanation: –

"The comings of the Lord are ever unexpected to us, – his coming at death, his coming to judge the world, his coming in his Kingdom, his coming in the harvest-times of men, his coming in the crises of our

lives, his coming with opportunities and open doors, his coming with the power of the holy spirit."

This blind teacher thus believes in seven comings of Christ, additional to his first coming eighteen centuries ago. More than this, the words we quote signify that the writer believes that a coming of Christ occurs every time a death occurs (or possibly he limited this to the death of his saints; but other teachers of the same school of darkness, when preaching funeral sermons, are accustomed to announce the Lord's coming in the death, not only of saints, but of pretty nearly everybody). This writer further claims a coming of Christ in all the crises as well as in all the opportunities of human life. He evidently believes (may we not say, dreams? – he surely is not *awake*, and surely his lamp is not trimmed and burning, nor the loins of his mind girt about) that there are millions of comings of Christ. Moreover, speaking (in his dreams) as a mouthpiece of the great Adversary, he speaks of the harvest-time of men – evidently to direct attention away from the Master's explanation that the harvest-time will be "the end of this age," in the which he himself will be the great Chief Reaper, and will associate with him his faithful servants in the work of gathering the wheat (his faithful) into his barn (the spiritual condition). – Matt. 13:30.

Note another method of wresting the Scriptures, and of attracting the minds of the Lord's people away from the great truth everywhere set forth in the Scriptures, and particularly enunciated in this parable, *viz.*, the second coming of our Lord as King, and the duty of all his faithful ones to be ready, expecting and joyously waiting for that event. This perversion and wresting of the Scriptures is in the interest of temperance, and represents the watching as implying temperance work, thus: "Not only those who are laboring and praying for temperance reform, but the young people especially, should be wide awake and *watchful* in regard to temperance. They should *watch* the effect of strong drink upon others. They should *watch* its effect upon the community. They should be on their

guard against the smallest beginnings of the habit of using intoxicating liquors. They should *watch* for opportunities of helping on the cause of temperance by word and by example, in public and in private."

Is it any wonder we hear the Master prophesy respecting the unfaithfulness amongst his professed people at this time, saying, "When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find *the* faith on the earth?" The form of the question implies the answer, No; he will not find the faith flourishing in the earth, – not predominating. Other Scriptures, however, assure us that at the time of his coming he will find a little flock of faithful watchers – not many great, wise or learned, but chiefly "the poor of this world, rich in faith, heirs of the Kingdom." As for Babylon in general, she is saying, with louder voice than ever, Have we not done! done! done! Are we not rich and increased in goods! Are we not compassing sea and land to make proselytes! [R2693 : page 270]

But the Master will say, Thou art poor and blind and miserable and naked, and knowest it not! (Rev. 3:17.) Thy colleges, of which thou dost boast, are they not the very hot-beds of infidelity, denying my Word – denying that my work was perfect in the beginning, and that present conditions of sin and degradation and death are the penalties of violation of my righteous law; denying also the value of my sacrifice for sins, given that the heavenly Father might be just and yet the justifier of him that believeth in me; denying that holy men of old spake and wrote as they were moved by the holy spirit, and claiming a superior wisdom as "higher critics," by which they determine that myself and my chosen and inspired apostles were ignorant and incompetent and deceived, when we quoted the words of the prophets and applied them; denying also my second coming, to gather my little flock, the Church, to associate them with me in the Kingdom promised through the prophets, which shortly shall bless all the families of the earth; claiming, on the contrary, that all things continue as they were from the beginning, – that a process of evolution is in progress, and that no Redeemer, no redemption and no restitution

are necessary – some of them going so far as to claim that no personal deity is necessary, but that what they call the laws of evolution are the creator, preserver and savior of the race.

Is it any wonder that under such false teachings in high places, and the same teachings repeated with more or less of ability throughout the length and breadth of Babylon – is it any wonder that my people are "perishing for lack of knowledge"? (Hos. 4:6.) They have "hidden the key of knowledge," and not only fail to enter into the privileges and opportunities of this Gospel age and its call, but them that would enter in they hinder by their false teachings and misrepresentations, putting darkness for light, and light for darkness. – Luke 11:52; 2 Pet. 2:1; 3:3,4; Amos 8:11; Matt. 23:13; Isa. 5:20.

Alas! that any whose eyes of understanding have been opened in any degree should be deluded into supposing that he can do God service by cooperating with Babylon in any measure, sense or degree. Surely they are under the blinding and stupefying influence of the Adversary when they do not hear sharply and distinctly the Lord's message to all of his true people at this time, to come out of Babylon and be not partakers of her sins, her errors, her false teachings, and the crime implied in these, and on account of which severe scourgings are coming upon Babylon, and will fall with special severity upon those who had known better, and who for any reason have refused to obey the voice of him that speaketh from heaven – our present Lord, King, Bridegroom. – Heb. 12:25-27; Rev. 18:4.

Our Lord applied the parable in few words, saying, "Be ye, therefore, ready also, for the Son of Man cometh at an hour that ye think not." That is to say, watchfulness for the great event of the King's return would be absolutely indispensable, and would constitute a mark or indication of those worthy to be called true servants or "brethren." We are not to make the mistake of supposing our Lord to mean, Watch incessantly, for you will not know when I do come. This would be an absurdity. The central thought of the parable is that the faithful

servants, awake and watching at the proper time, will hear the knock, will recognize the Lord's presence, will open to him, in the sense of believing and accepting his presence, and will be rewarded by him in the time of his presence by being supplied special knowledge respecting heavenly things which would be "meat in due season" to their comfort and joy. All who are faithfully watching shall know when the event occurs, so surely as those who do not watch shall not know.

The Apostle Paul speaks of this same great event and of the same class of watchers, designating them brethren; and after explaining that the second coming of our Lord would be upon the world as a thief and a snare, and that the world will not escape certain trouble and overthrow of their systems and politics, he explains that, on the contrary, "Ye brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake *you* as a thief" – you have your lamps trimmed and burning. As he further explains, the brethren worthy to know and to escape the troubles incidental to that time do not sleep, as do others; they are watchful; they are alert, and because thus alert they know of the Bridegroom's arrival, of which the world knows not; and in the time of his presence these brethren are fed with special spiritual food, which the world knows not of. The Master himself is sending forth, at the hands of his servants, the needed meat in due season, things new and old for the strengthening of his household for this present time of trial and for the perfecting of the saints for the work of ministry, to which he has called them. – 1 Thess. 5:1-6.

TO WHOM DOES THE PARABLE SPECIALLY APPLY?

This was Peter's question. He wondered whether or not the Lord meant that the specially chosen twelve apostles were these servants who must watch and wait for him at his second coming, or whether the parable was of general application, and meant that everybody should watch. Our Lord did not answer this question directly, for to have done so would have been contrary to the divine plan; to have

answered directly, to have shown that our Lord was not coming in the early watches of the Gospel night, would thus have been in contradiction [R2693 : page 271] of the very teaching of the parable, that he must be watched for all through the Gospel night.

Evading this feature of Peter's question our Lord embraces the opportunity to give some further instruction, and explains to Peter and to us all that at that time, "then," *i.e.*, at the time of his return, his second advent, he would look out and appoint a steward for the dispensing of spiritual food to the household of faith; and that a special blessing would be with that steward in the event of his faithfulness, and that he would be removed from the stewardship in the event of unfaithfulness. Faithfulness on the part of this steward would imply larger and continued service in dispensing [R2694 : page 271] the meat to the household of faith at that time. But unfaithfulness on his part, and a disposition to tyrannize the household, would be sure to result in his being cut off from further opportunities for serving the household, and lead to his having a severe experience with the unbelievers in the time of trouble then to come upon the world. And altho it is not stated, it is fairly inferable that such an one being deposed from stewardship, another would take his place, subject to similar terms and conditions as to faithfulness.

In certain senses of the word, and in certain respects, every child of God is a steward – a steward of his own talents, opportunities, privileges, abilities in the Lord's service; and each one is to recognize that his responsibilities as a steward in these respects is toward the Master who gave him the talents, and who will require at his hands an account thereof – an increase by reason of proper use. We are not, therefore, to understand our Lord's answer to Peter to imply that none of the household but the one are in any sense of the word regarded as stewards. Such an interpretation would be in conflict with numerous Scriptures. We are to notice that the stewardship mentioned is not a stewardship of talents and opportunities, but a stewardship of spiritual food merely.

Neither does it imply that in the end of this age, and at the time of our Lord's presence and the sending forth of meat in due season that the special steward alone will have to do with the dispensing of the food for the household, for, as shown in Matthew's account of this parable (Matt. 24:45-51), there are "fellow-servants" whose duty and privilege it will be to cooperate with this steward in the dispensing of the viands, the feeding of the household of faith. The thought would seem to be that in the interest of the household, and for its comfort and joy and blessing, the Master at an appropriate time would furnish to some one of his servants a key to the precious things of his Word, thus providing bountifully "things new and old" for the sustenance and joy of the household, and minister these through numerous fellow-servants, as well as through the one to whom the key of this stewardship would be specially entrusted.

In this connection we are to remember that every stewardship brings with it weighty responsibilities, and while such responsibilities are not to be shirked, neither are any of them to be undertaken lightly, without appreciating the fact that every one who becomes a servant of the household of faith has thereby a larger degree of responsibility, not only toward the household, but toward the Master of the house, from whom comes every commission. And every servant is to remember that unfaithfulness would surely lead to his removal, even as every manifestation of humble faithfulness on his part will endear him to the Master and to every faithful member of the household, and imply his continuance in the service until the Master shall say, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joys of thy Lord."

[R2694 : page 271]

REVIEW OF THIRD QUARTER. – SEPT. 30.

"Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." – Jas. 1:22.

Reviews are frequently profitable, and especially so when conducted in the light of this Golden Text; with a view to noting to what extent we have heard the voice of the Son of Man, and to what extent we have been obedient to his messages. To fancy ourselves as making spiritual progress merely by gaining information respecting the Lord, his miracles, his teachings, etc., is to get the nut and crack it and drop the kernel, the thing of real value.

It is in harmony with this thought that our Lord declared, "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and they that hear shall live." The dead are the entire human family, all of whom must hear the voice, the teaching of this great Prophet, whom the Father has sent, not only to redeem, but also to restore so many of the human family as will accept his favors upon his terms. All must hear eventually, but comparatively few have the hearing ears at the present time. The prince of this world blinds the mind, closes and stupefies the ear, or makes what may be heard of no effect through traditions of men, or through hardness and selfishness of the hearer's own heart. Blessed are our eyes if, seeing and hearing of the Lord's grace and goodness toward us and toward all of his creatures, we at once fall into obedience to the spirit of the great Teacher's instructions. In so doing we will have passed from death unto life – gradually, until, under the ministry of the great Prophet, as sharers in the first resurrection, we shall be perfected and possess life in perfection, yea, life more abundantly, – immortality.
