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"LIKE UNTO MEN WHO WAIT FOR THEIR LORD."

– LUKE 12:35-48. – MAY 8. –

Golden Text. – "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh, shall find watching."

FOLLOWING up his instruction respecting his approaching death and resurrection, and after the transfiguration vision which emphasized this lesson to the apostles, our Lord began to explain to them something respecting his second coming and what their attitude should be in the interval. The present lesson [R3354 : page 123] emphasizes this matter. During the Lord's absence his people were to be continually on the alert; their loins girded would represent that they were to be ready for service all the time – actively engaged in promoting the interests of the Kingdom. According to the custom of that time, loose, flowing garments were used, and the girdle at the waist drew these into proper place so as to permit of the ordinary services of life. When rest was sought the girdle was loosed. Consequently the lesson of the figure is constant activity on the part of the Lord's people during his absence from us. We are not to become charged with the cares of this world and slumber and sleep, and thus refrain from attending to the duties properly devolving upon us.

Each one of the Lord's servants is represented as a light bearer, and instructed to let his light so shine before men that they, seeing his good works, may glorify the Father in heaven. The picture is that of general darkness, ignorance, superstition and sin in the world, while the Lord's disciples have been granted the light of divine revelation and wisdom and understanding, which not only transforms them and makes of them New Creatures, but also shines through them unto all with whom they come in contact. "Ye are the light of the world." A suggestion is here in place, namely, that the Great Light, the glorious sunrise of the Millennial morning, has not yet taken place; the Lord's people are still in the world as little lights, shining in the midst of

general darkness and watching and waiting for the morning. The Prophet's words were in line with this when he said, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." This night time of darkness and ignorance and sin began with the curse of death, which came upon our race through father Adam's disobedience, and the whole creation is groaning and travailing together, waiting for the morning, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God – Christ Jesus and his brethren, his joint-heirs in the Kingdom.

Our Lord gave a parable to illustrate the alertness and attentiveness that should characterize his followers. Amongst the Jews there would be no occasion on which the servants of the household would be expected to be more alert or to manifest more interest in the welfare of the household than on the night or morning on which their master would come to his home bringing with him his bride. And so the Lord chooses this as an appropriate illustration of the alertness that should characterize his followers while waiting for his second coming. As a matter of fact, the servants in this parable are the bride of another parable, but represent the matter from another standpoint. The sole lesson here is that diligence in service, that watchfulness for the interests of the Master's cause, that faith in his promise to return and expectancy of the event, serve as an aid or stimulus to proper service. When the master of the house should arrive with his company it would be a reflection against the interest of his servants and their love and devotion for him if on such an occasion they were found asleep or otherwise than ready to open the door at the Master's intimation of his arrival.

IF THOU WILT NOT WATCH THOU SHALT NOT KNOW.

The parable implies that at our Lord's second coming he will have arrived before any of his faithful servants will be aware of the fact. His presence will be made known by the knock, and the knock would correspond to an announcement, through some special servant

or servants, either orally or by the printed page, setting forth the evidences of the Master's presence. For instance, the publishing of time prophecies showing that the time is fulfilled – that certain prophecies marking events belonging to the close of the Gospel dispensation and the opening of the Millennial dispensation are accomplished, and that certain signs mentioned in the Scriptures are fulfilled – such testimonies are in the nature of a knock, which would be heard by such of the servants of the Lord as would be awake at that time. It is not for the servants in general to do the knocking, but for the Master himself to set in operation the forces and agencies he may choose to use for producing this knock and the announcement.

A blessing is promised to those servants who at that time shall be on the alert and hear the knock and understand it, and welcome the Master. Verse 39 shows quite distinctly that none except the servants are to appreciate the knock – that the world in general will not know of the time of the Master's return, but only his servants. No particular time for the Master's coming is set, but the intimation is clearly given that it is not for them to know the times and seasons, but **[R3355 : page 123]** for them to be on the alert continually, not only during the first watch, but during the second and during the third, that at whatever time the Master's knock may be heard they may respond promptly. It is not the thought, let it be noticed, that the servants are never to know when the Master will come: it is the thought that on his arrival he will cause such a knocking to be made as will be appreciated by all of his servants who are awake and waiting and watching. Wherein would be the use of the knock if the servants were not to know when they heard the knock? The knock is to be the evidence of the presence, and the servants are not to know in advance, but are to know at the time of the arrival and that without seeing.

THE MASTER WILL SERVE HIS SERVANTS.

What will be the special reward of these servants? The parable states it: their Master will "gird himself [he will become their servant]

and will make them to [R3355 : page 124] sit down to meat and will come forth and serve them." This implies that at our Lord's second coming he will be present before any of his servants know of his arrival. He will knock or cause announcement of his presence to be made. Those who will hear the knock will be such only as are awake and ready, expecting him and on the alert for the knock. These will receive a special spiritual feast. It will be special because it is on a special occasion and intended as a special reward for their manifestation of interest and devotion. It will be special also, because the Master of the household, turned to be its servant, would have all the keys to all the riches of grace and blessing, and, as elsewhere explained, will bring forth from his treasuries – his pantries – things new and old, substantials and delicacies. The faithful ones will surely have a royal feast, such as never before was granted them.

These things, we hold, have already been fulfilled. The knock, or proclamation of the Lord's presence, as indicated by the Old Testament prophecies, has been given since 1875 and is still being given. The knock of the parable might appropriately be but for a few seconds, but the fulfilment would properly cover a period of years. The servants of the household are taking notice, and each one as he opens his heart and mind to the fact of the Lord's presence receives a fulfilment of the blessing promised – receives a feast of fat things, spiritual – an understanding and appreciation of the divine plan and a soul nourishment and strengthening such as was never his before. That this serving of the servants by the Master should be understood to be an individual work and not merely a collective service and feast, is evidenced by the Lord's statement in Revelation 3:20. Here the Lord represents the same event in connection with his message to the last phase of his Church nominal, the Laodicean phase. He says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man [individual] hear my voice [knock] and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me."

"A THOUSAND YEARS...ARE AS A WATCH IN THE NIGHT."

According to the ancient Jewish method of reckoning the night time, the second watch would be from ten to two o'clock and the third from two to six o'clock. The parable does not state in which watch the Master may be expected. That question was left open; the faithfulness of the servants would be tested in proportion to his delay. Many would find it easy to keep awake and alert during the first watch, not so many during the second watch and still fewer during the third. It is in accord with this implication of the parable that we find today general lethargy prevailing amongst Christian people respecting the return of the Bridegroom and the glorious things of the Kingdom then to be brought unto his faithful household. Many are asleep in Zion, many are overcharged with the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. Not only have worldly people made a god of business, money and pleasure, but many who are at heart lovers of righteousness and who desire to be considered servants of the Lord, are seriously overcharged – absorbed in worldly things. Their hearts are so filled with these and their minds so occupied with dreams of Churchianity and pleasure and personal interest that they cannot hear the knock. They know not of the Master's presence; they open not their hearts to this wonderful announcement, for which the Lord's people have waited so long and prayed so earnestly, "Thy Kingdom come." They are missing, as a consequence, a great blessing implied in our Lord's parable, and definitely stated in Daniel's prophecy – "O, the blessedness of him that waiteth and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days." – Dan. 12:12.

HIS PRESENCE UNKNOWN TO THE WORLD.

"But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through."

The reference here is to a thief-like coming, and the Greek word, translated broken through, would mean literally "dug into." Many of the houses of olden time were not built of stone or bricks but of dried mud, somewhat like what are known as adobe houses in some parts of the West and in Mexico. Entry into such houses could be gained more quickly by digging through the wall than by forcing the door. The goodman of the house or its master does not refer to the Lord, for the house referred to is the "present evil world" – the social structure as at present organized. It is not necessary to conclude that Satan is meant, although he is in a general way the master of present institutions, "the god of this world," the "prince of this world." We may properly enough understand the goodman of the house to here signify earthly governments, the powers that be, the representatives of the ten toes of Daniel's image and of his fourth beast.

This matter of the second coming of the Lord and the knock which will be heard by those of his servants who are awake, but not heard by his servants who are asleep and overcharged, will be totally unknown to the world. To them his presence will not be that of a master longed for and served, but that of an opponent whose house they have in his absence taken possession of and used contrary to his interests. These, if they knew the time of his coming, would have fortified themselves in some manner and have sought to defend present institutions and to perpetuate them.

The coming as a thief upon the world signifies a **[R3355 : page 125]** quiet coming, unostentatious, unknown, without heralds or any commotion likely to disturb. The breaking up of the strong man's house – the breaking up of present institutions, civil, religious, political, financial – is already under way, just as the knocking for his servants is in process. The entire social structure is under control of the new Prince. He is marshaling his forces, and will cause even the wrath of man to praise him and to work out his purposes in the overthrow of every known institution built upon selfishness. Great will be the fall thereof – "a time of trouble such as was not since there

was a nation"; but upon the ruins the King of kings and Lord of lords will rear the grand Kingdom of the Lord, for which all who are his already pray, "Thy Kingdom come," and which, when it shall come to be instituted by the Lord, will be indeed the "desire of all nations." – Haggai 2:7.

"IN SUCH AN HOUR AS YE THINK NOT."

The essence of this lesson is summed up in the 40th verse, "Be ye also ready; for in an hour ye think not the Son of man cometh." No one will be aware of the hour of the Son of man's coming; it is not a matter that is left in such a form as to be speculated upon in advance. His knock will be the first intimation of his presence. And so it has been fulfilled: none of us knew in advance when the Lord's coming would take place; it was after it had occurred that we heard the knock – his voice through the prophets of the Old Testament, declaring to us that we are already in the harvest time and in the days of the presence of the Son of man. Here we have fulfilled the words of the Lord in Matthew 24:37, "As the days of Noah were, so shall also the *parousia* [presence] of the Son of man be." The text shows that the thought is that as the world was ignorant of coming events in Noah's days, and, being ignorant, was eating and drinking and planting and building, so it will be in the days of the presence of the Son of man: the world will be ignorant of the fact of his presence, and the ordinary affairs of life will be progressing as usual. Only "ye brethren" who hear the knock will discern the presence and get the blessing.

Peter inquired whether or not this parable was applicable only to the twelve apostles, or to all those who were disciples in a general sense. Our Lord measurably ignored the question in his reply, "Who then is the faithful and wise steward whom his lord shall set over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?" The implication seems to be that when the right time should come for understanding the parable, it would be clearly set forth: that at the

time of the parable's fulfilment the Lord would appoint a servant in the household to bring these matters to the attention of all the servants, and that certain responsibilities would rest upon such a one respecting the dispatch of his duties. If faithfully performed a great blessing would be his reward, and if unfaithful to his charge severe penalties would be inflicted. The implication would be also that if faithful the servant would be continued in his service, and if unfaithful he would be dismissed and another take the position and its responsibilities.

"THE FAITHFUL AND THE WISE STEWARD."

We would naturally enough endeavor to interpret our Lord's words as signifying a composite steward – that is that a certain number or class of brethren together would constitute the steward of this parable. In endeavoring to make such an interpretation we are [R3356 : page 125] met with several difficulties, however.

(1) To suppose such a class in the Church would be to recognize what is elsewhere denied – to recognize a clerical or authoritative class as distinct and separate from the remainder of the Church, because this steward is to dispense the meat in due season to the household, to the fellow-servants. The Church of Christ, we hold, is not composed of clergy and laity, but "ye are all one in Christ Jesus, and one is your Master, even Christ." There would be no violation of principle, however, in supposing that the Lord at the time indicated would specially use one member of his Church as the channel or instrument through which he would send the appropriate messages, spiritual nourishment appropriate at that time; because at various times in the past the Lord has used individuals in such a manner. For instance, Peter used the "keys" of the Kingdom of heaven at Pentecost, and again at the home of Cornelius, and in both places he was used as a special servant in connection with the dispensing of special truths. This did not constitute Peter a lord over the other apostles or over the Church, but merely a servant.

(2) However much we might endeavor to apply this figure to the Lord's people collectively, the fact would still remain that the various items stated would not fit to a company of individuals. For instance, in the 42nd verse, in the common version it is rendered, *that* faithful steward; the revised version, *the* faithful steward; as though a particular one were meant and the term not used indefinitely for a number. Turning to the Greek text we find that the emphasis is there also and in double form – the faithful, the wise steward. If it were a case in which we could apply this text to Christ, there would be no difficulty, or if it were a case in which it could be applied to the whole body of Christ, there could be no difficulty, in harmonizing the one with the many members of the one body of Christ; but since the servant mentioned is to dispense food to the other members of the body, his fellow-servants, the term seems to be limited to some particular individual. However, just as we said of Peter, that he was not by reason of special use made a lord over the brethren, so we say of whoever is meant [R3356 : page 126] in this passage, that in no sense of the word would this constitute him a lord, or dictator or master, or imply his inspiration. All that we could say would be that it would be one who would be privileged to be a servant, and not many seem anxious to fill such a position in the true sense of the word. This servant, if found faithful, would be intrusted more and more with the distribution of every feature of Present Truth as represented in the parable, by his being given the dispensing of the food in due season to the household. Unfaithfulness on the part of this appointed one would mean his degradation from this service, and presumably the service would go on at the hands of another, his successor.

The expression, "Verily I say unto you, He shall make him ruler over all his goods," should not be understood to apply to future glories and honors, but merely to a more general charge or stewardship as respects the dispensing of the Lord's "goods" or truths due to be protected or disbursed during the remainder of this "harvest" time. In other words, the steward through whom the Lord will dispense Present Truth in this "harvest," will, if found vigilant, humble,

faithful, be continued in the stewardship and be used of the Lord more and more in the service of the household – down to the close of the "harvest."

"NOT AS LORDS OVER GOD'S HERITAGE."

That this servant must not act or be regarded as a lord is clearly indicated in the 45th verse, which shows that such a misuse of his appointment would work his downfall. At no time has the Church ever had need to be on guard against its servants who really endeavored to serve it and to hand forth from the Lord's treasure house the meat in due season. The Church's dangers have always arisen from those who sought to lord it over God's heritage, and to dispense their own wisdom or the wisdom of other men instead of the Word of the Lord.

Verses 47,48, seem to imply that the servant's responsibility to the Lord will be in proportion to his knowledge of the Lord's will; and that the Lord will deal with him on the principle that having had much knowledge and opportunity, the requirements at his hands will be proportionately large.

While this exhortation in general seems to apply to one particular servant through whom the other servants are to be supplied (see Matt. 24:45-51), we can see that the same principles in a general sense would apply to each servant in turn, as he would receive either food or stewardship. His responsibility would be in proportion to what he received or had opportunity to receive, and to the manner in which he used the blessing. We of today, living under such great favor from the Lord, enjoying the light of Present Truth as we do, have every reason to give thanks and more and more to appreciate the things new and old from the Master's storehouse of Truth that he is now dispensing to us, and which each in turn is privileged to dispense to others and has responsibility for in proportion to his knowledge. The Lord help us each to be faithful, and to remember that our Lord was a servant as

well as a Son, and that our highest privilege as sons is to be faithful servants, stewards of the manifold grace of God.

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"TO OBEY IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE"

Obedience to the Lord our God
Is what he doth require;
He looketh not for sacrifice
Without his Spirit's power.

The light of Truth that shines from God
And shows to us his way,
Reveals the path wherein to walk
While in this house of clay.

If God's great plan in vision speaks,
As prophets said it would,
Oh, may we heed its welcome voice
And be among "the good."

Pray, do not compromise the Truth;
Oh, sell it not, my friend:
Obedience doth our God require
Until our course shall end.

If faithful to our trust on earth
And hold "the faith" once given,
Then will our Master say, "Well done!
Come thou, and enter heaven."

– *James Hay.*
