

THE WATCHERS

By

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“Watch Therefore, For You Know Not On What Day Your Lord Comes” (Matt. 24:42).

It has become the custom of many Christians to see in every event among the nations a fulfillment of some prophecy and new evidence that we are near the last day and the coming of the Lord. Many are engrossed in thoughts of anti-Christ, Armageddon, rapture, tribulation, and they see in every calamity another signal that the final calamity is about to occur. There are many prophetic teachers that seem to have only one desire, and that is to see some terrible holocaust to begin which to them would indicate a final war and all the other events which they have scheduled into end-time affairs. In the Arab-Israel situation a lot of Christians apparently are willing to excuse all manner of terrorism on the part of Israel because they see them as God’s chosen people and think that their political aspirations somehow fit into some Old Testament prophecy.

In “Christianity Today” of April 6, 1979, there is an ad which reads, in part, “Nominations for anti-Christ now being received. Support letter must accompany nomination. Nominee must be living,…” etc.

The obsession with trying to fit every political and national event into some prophecy has had the very opposite effect on Christians of that which the Lord intended when prophecies were given. Jesus said concerning the events of His coming, “Watch therefore, for you know not on what day your Lord comes.” How plainly Jesus expressed the fact that His servants would not know the day He would return. In spite of this, there are many who argue that although they do not know the exact calendar day they can discern the times, interpret all the events in the light of prophecies and have a good idea of the general time of His return, the year and perhaps even the month. While Jesus said that you cannot know the day, they seem to think that perhaps at least you can know the day before! The expression, “Watch therefore” has come to mean for many that they are to continually watch all the signs of the times and keep their eye on the sky so they will be watching the very place where His is to appear.

Just what did Jesus mean when He said to watch? For one thing He did not mean to watch for His coming, for He made it clear that we would not know the day upon which He was arriving. Concerning the time of Christ’s appearance, he said it would be “as it was in the days of Noah.” In that day, He said, people were going about their customary lives of eating and drinking and marrying. This does not mean that there was something wrong with their eating and drinking and marrying. These are normal activities of life. Even Noah and his household ate and drank and got married. The point of this expression is simply to say that life is going to be going on as usual when Jesus comes. He will come without warning. He said it would be like a thief in the night, No one is going to know. This doesn’t mean that He will come secretly, for He will come with a great amount of fanfare — with His angels, and as lightning is seen from the east to the west, He said He would be recognized. But coming as a thief means that it will be a

time unannounced so that all those who rejected Him will find that the end has come and they are not ready. WATCH OUT.

The expression “to watch” has to do with watching for oneself. To be “on watch” simply means to be on the alert, to be ready for any event. A Christian is to watch himself, to watch his step. Jesus said, “Therefore be you also ready; for in an hour that you think not the Son of man comes” (Matt. 24:44). He then illustrates this expression in the verses following. “Who then is the faithful and wise servant whom his Lord has set over His household to give them their food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when He comes, shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you that He will set him over all that He has” (Matt. 24:45–47). That faithful servant is not nearly so much concerned with when his Lord is going to return as he is with seeing that he performs his duties during the Lord’s absence. Clearly this is the import of Jesus’ admonition to watch. We are the servants of the Lord and he has set us over His household. The Christian’s duty is not to be concerned with his Lord’s time schedule. He may tarry as long as He pleases or He may return at any moment, but the Christian has his duties to perform, to give the food “in due season.” He is to tend to his **own** schedule. Whenever the Lord returns He will find His faithful servant ready.

It would seem that one way to displease the Master would be for the servant to be preoccupied about how the Master is dealing with other people, about how He is conducting His business, studying the Master’s schedules and timetables trying to determine when He would return. This would be the occupation of an unfaithful servant, seeking to escape his responsibilities. What our Lord wants is servants who are concerned with serving Him, doing the work He has assigned.

This especially applies to preachers who have the special responsibility of feeding the flock and giving them “their food in due season.” Too many congregations do not receive the proper nourishment because the Lord’s servant is too busy trying to tell them when the Lord is coming, how He is coming and all that must happen just before He comes, so that he never gets to the point of giving them the spiritual nourishment which would strengthen their faith and build them up in service so that they might be ready when the Lord comes.

To watch in this respect, that is to watch for oneself that he is always ready to meet the Lord, is appropriate for all seasons. It was appropriate during the early days following Christ’s ascension even though it was to be nearly two thousand years at least before Christ would return. The apostles and those early Christians were watching, in that they were carefully and faithfully serving the Lord, ready for His coming at any moment. Although some of them were disappointed in that He did not return during their lifetimes, their watchfulness was not wasted. They still will receive their reward for their faithful lives and for their faithful witness.

The Lord does not try to fool anyone. He is not deceptive. There is no guile in His mouth. When He said, “Therefore watch,” He was not suggesting that He would come just for the purpose of surprising His faithful people. Surely He would not tell people in every century to keep their eyes fastened on the skies just in case He should suddenly take a notion to come. Rather He meant that we are to watch our own lives, our own actions, our own witness, and in doing so we are ready at any moment. If we should meet with accident or be martyred or suddenly stricken with disease, it could be said that we have been faithful until the very last minute and we are ready.

WATCH FOR OTHERS. The watcher on the wall of an ancient city was put there to watch for the safety of the entire city. He was to sound the alarm in case of any impending danger. The prophet Ezekiel was called a “Watchman unto the house of Israel” and the Lord said to him, “When I say unto the wicked thou shalt surely die and thou gives him no warning nor speaks to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand” (Ezek. 3:18). In this sense, Christians are called upon to watch, to warn of the evil that surrounds us and to warn of the advancement of humanism, to speak against the subtle but deadly disease of covetousness, which is idolatry, and to detect and give warning concerning the indifference and displaced loyalty that is so evident among the churches today. We are to watch for the children to help them resist the power and the poison of today’s peddlers of sex and materialism.

Paul writes that we are to “become blameless and harmless children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you are seen as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life” (Phil. 2:15–16). Here is the task, not to instill terror into the hearts of our brethren by continually crying “Armageddon,” “Anti-Christ,” “Tribulation,” and other scary concepts, but by demonstrating that God is at work in our world, and in us His children, accomplishing His purpose out of the crucible of trouble, affliction, rebellion and opposition, and is molding man into His own image.

A WATCHMAN’S STAND. Standing watch does not mean idleness. Jesus did not imply that by watching and praying we are simply sitting around waiting for things to happen. This is seen from His illustration of the faithful servant. The faithful servant is to be found going about his duties, taking care of everything in due season and according to schedule. This becomes increasingly more difficult to do as the structure of society becomes less stable and the message of the gospel becomes more confused. There can be no doubt that the church is under attack from humanism which has become the religion of the state, of education, of the media and of the arts. From another quarter we are under the attack of all the spiritual forces of the devil through witchcraft and various forms of spiritualism. We are at war. Paul wrote, “Our warfare is not against flesh and blood but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual host of wickedness in the heavenly places. Wherefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand. Stand therefore” (Eph. 6:12–14). Then the apostle describes a Christian soldier, ready to do battle for the Lord. We are told to take “the sword of the spirit which is the word of God with all prayer and supplication, praying at all seasons in the spirit and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplications for all the saints” (Eph 6:17–18). Paul combines watching with the primary work of using God’s word to present His truth of righteousness in opposition to all the evil of the devil.

One who loves the Lord longs to see Him face to face. We look forward to the day when we may rest from our labors. Therefore, we will welcome the coming of our King, cessation of warfare and an entrance into that new creation wherein dwells righteousness. But our loyalty is not tested by how much we would love to cease our labors but by how zealous we enter into them. When Jesus returns He will be looking for the faith, the kind of faith “that works by love.”

We must remember that the book of Revelation was not written to focus attention upon the world and the works of the devil, but rather to focus attention upon the power of God to sustain His people and to bring victory out of seeming defeat. Prophecy, when interpreted properly, does not generate a spirit of defeatism such as we see in so many today who are ready to sit down and fold their hands and wait for the end. Rather it is given to inspire us to take a stand against Satan and the proponents of evil and to courageously fight the good fight of the faith knowing that we are already victory through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The wickedness and corruption in the world, plus the increase in witchcraft and loss of true faith, would encourage the thought that the Lord must soon return. However, we do not know just how bad conditions may become before He calls a halt and comes in judgment.

In the midst of the conflict the Christian is set to watch, not to watch for His return, but to watch over His business, to watch for one's own faithfulness, to watch for the sake of his people, and to warn the wicked and proclaim the way of salvation.

We who are Christian are the only ones in the world who can express the truth of Christ in opposition to humanism, pagan superstition and satanic spiritualism. We are soldiers of the cross. Ours is not to sit and beg for the battle to end, but to pray for strength to wield the sword of truth and hasten to the front to win the victory.

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