

The Promise of His Return

***“Watch ye
therefore: for ye
know not when the
master of the house
cometh, at even, or
at midnight, or at
the cockcrowing, or
in the morning.”***

—Mark 13:35

meaning and spiritual endeavor for the Lord’s people who are now living during the closing years of this present Gospel Age.

The end of the age ‘watchers,’ therefore, must be alert to the necessity of basic doctrinal teachings that are common to the faith in which we all share during the harvest period of this age. To this end, the Apostle Paul has thus admonished, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.” (I Cor. 16:13) This fixed purpose is accomplished in the light of the apostle’s further admonition to Timothy, when he encouraged him to “take heed”

IN THE LAST PART OF THIS

“Treasures of the Truth” series, our attention was directed toward the importance of Jude’s testimony that we should “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude

3) His exhortation has special

unto himself, and the basic doctrines of Truth that are essential to our salvation, and the sharing of those marvelous words of Truth with others who may have an ear to hear.—I Tim.4:16

OUR LORD'S PROMISE

In this third part of the series, the comforting promise that our Lord and Savior gave to his followers during the closing scenes of his earthly ministry will be addressed. He explained to his disciples that it would be necessary for him to leave them for a while, to go to his “Father’s house,” and “prepare a place” for them. (John 14:1,2) He then spoke these most wonderful words of promise, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.”—vss. 3,4

EXHORTATION TO WATCH

Our featured scripture, and the context from which it has been selected, implies that it would be uncertain when the Master—our Lord Jesus—would return as he had promised. We read, “Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.” (Mark 13:32,33) Those who were looking forward to that time were exhorted to watch for the event, although its precise time was not definitely stated. Mark’s account implies that the time would be revealed to the watching ones who would take ‘heed,’ and be prayerfully alert. Those who were not alert and watching, as our Lord instructed, would know neither the time,

nor the events, which would be known and recognized by those who were watching for their accomplishment.

The exhortation to ‘watch’ is fully corroborated by other scriptures. In this connection, the Apostle Paul thus encourages us, “Yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.” (I Thess. 5:2-6) The apostle’s emphasis concerns the children of light who will be watching, and enlightened by our Lord’s presence and his teachings.

A LIGHT IN A DARK PLACE

The Apostle Peter suggests the means by which the Master will teach and inform us respecting the path upon which we are walking. He shows that it will not be by miraculous revelations or by dreams, but through the scriptural testimony—the Word of Truth. “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.” (II Pet. 1:19) The emphasis is once again directed toward those who abide in the light of the ‘sure word of prophecy.’

Although it was not God's will for his people to know anything definite in advance respecting

the exact time of our Lord Jesus' return, the due time would come at the end of the age when the faithful watchers would be blessed with the unlocked treasures of Truth, and revealing the time of the Second Advent. The skeptical and worldly-wise would be left in darkness and ignorance. Those who try to prove to themselves, or to others, that no one will ever know anything respecting the time of the Second Presence of our Lord, thus fail to appreciate the deeper and spiritually significant meaning of Jesus' comforting words. The watchers are commanded to watch that they may recognize the proper times and seasons concerning the wonderful plan of God, and not be otherwise left in utter darkness with the world. We are thus assured by the Prophet Daniel, "Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand." (Dan. 12:10) We must remain in the light even if others continue in darkness.

FAITHFULLY WATCHING

Some Christian people have been offended and stumbled respecting the Master's teaching concerning his promised Second Coming. This has sometimes resulted because of unreasonable and literal viewpoints concerning the manner of his invisible presence. We are not at liberty to reject one of the most beautiful and prominent teachings of the Scriptures simply because others may have erred respecting the subject. Some may bring a certain amount of worldly wisdom upon anything connected with the teachings of the Second Advent.

This doctrine is the fulfillment of the inspiring promise made by our Lord Jesus himself as he was concluding his earthly ministry, and his words should be given a prominent place among the precious jewels of Divine truth. His encouraging words have the power to enhance all of the related promises and blessings that are associated with it. It should not be set aside or hidden, but should be given its true place in the plan of God for the blessing of all who are sincerely and truly his people.

I WILL RECEIVE YOU UNTO MYSELF

The teachings and promises regarding Christ's Second Presence are at the very center of the Divine plan for the reconciliation and future blessing of all the families of the earth through the seed of promise. These promises have been established upon the prophetic words of the prophets, apostles, and by our Lord Jesus himself. Many honest-hearted Christian people have loved and appreciated these teachings. They hold a most prominent place in their hearts, while other Christians may hold no real importance to the subject, doctrinally or otherwise.

Our watching is for the Second Coming of him who redeemed us, and who promised, 'I will come again, and receive you unto myself.' The word receive, as used here by John, means to take along-side of. It was also used by the Apostle Paul when he wrote to the brethren at Corinth concerning the Gospel that had been received by them. "Brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand." (I Cor. 15:1) He spoke further about the importance of trusting in his teachings of scripture

saying, “By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory [hold fast, *Marginal Translation*] what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.” (vs. 2) The apostle next used the word receive to support his own faith—“I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.”—vs. 3

The watching includes not only the thought of the return of our Lord, but also the wonderful hope that his faithful bride has to be received by him in due time, into his glorious kingdom. At that time, they will be with him in his glory and share in the great privilege of lifting up and blessing the human creation.

BLESSINGS FROM THE PROMISED SEED

The groaning creation has long awaited the glorious future kingdom of righteousness and peace, and the fulfillment of the promised seed of Abraham. This wonderful promise is one in which our Heavenly Father has been selecting the members of the bride of Christ during this present Gospel Age. They will be with the Lord Jesus and share his glory as joint-heirs with him in carrying out the marvelous and beneficent provisions for blessing the poor sin-sick world.

This promise is sure of fulfillment. “The angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed

shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”—Gen. 22:15-18

SHARING HIS GLORY

Watching implies hoping, as well as waiting. We are waiting for that of which the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to Titus—“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” (Titus 2:13) During the process of calling and testing the members of his body, he thus transforms his bride from the flesh to his own spiritual image and likeness. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”—I John 3:2

The faithful will be like him, see him as he is, share his glory, and be associated with him in the great work of bringing blessings of life and peace to the whole world of mankind. This waiting and hoping time is also a time of tribulation, not only for the world which lies under the yoke of sin and the blinding influences of Satan, but also to the church members, of whom the apostle says, “Not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”—Rom. 8:23

Those who study the Word of God have come to realize the manner in which our Lord Jesus has returned to establish his kingdom. “Yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night” (I Thess. 5:2), and its dawning

cannot be discerned with the natural eye. If the Second Advent of our Lord were to be an open and outward manifestation, the world would also know of it as soon as the Lord's people, those who were instructed to watch and be on the alert for it. It would not be true that the 'day of the Lord' would come as a 'thief' unawares to the world and the church was left in darkness and with no knowledge of the event.

GOD'S WORD—OUR LAMP

We are to watch the signs of the times, and in the light of God's Word—our lamp. The Gospel Age has surely been a nighttime, and the Lord's people have been waiting for the Master to return as promised. "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early [when the morning appeareth, *Marginal Translation*].—Ps. 46:5

The Word of God has been the guiding light for the pathway of the church throughout this Gospel Age, as expressed by David, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Ps. 119:105) The lamp, as the truth of revelation, has guided all of the faithful, watchful pilgrims in their journey toward the celestial city—the heavenly Jerusalem. What a comfort it has been to us, and how dark and dreary would our pilgrim journey have been without it. Looking back we praise the way that God has led us day by day.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Those who have taken heed to the landmarks pointed out by the Lord through his prophets Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and (*Continued on page 35*)

(Continued from page 31) others, realize that we have already come on a much longer journey than was expected by the church when first she started out. But we realize also from these landmarks that we have now approached very near to the end of the journey, and to the time when the great blessing, for which God's people have so long waited and prayed for, is at hand. The watchers have noted the Master's testimony through the Prophet Daniel that 'the time of the end' would be a period of time during which there would be an increase in travel—running 'to and fro' throughout the earth. Our time is marked by an increase of general knowledge as Daniel foretold. "Even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased."—Dan. 12:4

We must watch carefully the foretold signs of the times, and respect the gracious things which God has promised us. The alert watchers are not indifferent to the fulfillment of prophecy which is to be seen on every hand today. Others may be aware of our changing world, but the child of God discerns them not only as facts but also as proof that we are living in the foretold period termed 'the time of the end.' It is also the day of preparation for the blessings of the kingdom that will soon follow, of which the Prophet Malachi wrote. "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings."—Mal. 4:2

INCREASING TROUBLE

Daniel's prophecy points out that the Lord's Second Presence brings an increase of knowledge, and that increase of knowledge also brings an increase

of trouble and discontent to the world of mankind in general. The result will be, as he has prophetically stated, "At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book."—Dan. 12:1

The faithful watchers, seeking to know whether these things are being fulfilled, recognize the chaos and level of violence that marks our day as the climactic ending of this Gospel Age. They also put their trust in God that their names will be found written in the book of life. The people of God can clearly discern the great approaching climax of human trouble. The Scriptures distinctly declare that all present human institutions will descend into anarchy, confusion, and chaos.

ALL SHALL PRAISE HIM

The child of God does not lose sight of our Heavenly Father or his providence. They see that the approaching social and ecclesiastical catastrophe will be the natural result of pride and selfishness. They also remember and trust that God is in full control of all things as expressed by the psalmist. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."—Ps. 76:10

The followers of our Lord Jesus look not merely at the outward signs, as seen in the world, but scrutinize carefully the Bible's prophetic outline of world history. It is because they see the 'time of trouble' outlined in the prophecies that they know that it is

sure to come, and are able to discern the signs of the times. It was in respect to this that Jesus promised the watchers that the Holy Spirit should guide them into all Truth, as each feature becomes due, and show them things to come. "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come."—John 16:13

The same record that shows the downfall of all earthly institutions, shows also that their fall is so timed in the great plan of God that it will be the very hour in which he will establish his kingdom. It will be in the hands of the elect church, whose exaltation will be to the glory of God and to the blessing of every creature. The watchers note that our Lord Jesus provided them a prophetic outline of the Gospel Age at the very time of his promised return, and preparation for his long-awaited kingdom of Truth and righteousness.

This suggests the necessity to watch for the things that our Lord Jesus particularly noted. The watchers are to be in harmony with his Word, and have respect for his teachings and promises. They must not neglect the words which he spoke, and should carefully note the very prophecies in connection with which he tells us to watch. They understand that the Day of the Lord will be ushered in at the close of this present Gospel Age unawares to the world, and known only to those who are alert and watching.

PROGRESSIVE REVEALING

The unlocking of hidden treasures of Truth was associated with the Second Presence of our Lord

Jesus. This fact has been a great blessing to the household of faith, and those who have been witnesses to this prophetic fulfillment at the end of this age. God's people have been richly blessed by the increasing light that has been shed upon all doctrines and teachings of the Truth, and they have readily shared in sending forth that message to others who may have an ear to hear.

The revealing of the foretold time for the Master's return was made known first to the watchers who were on hand and alert to the promises of God. The light of Truth and the knowledge concerning the marvelous plans and purposes of God was a great blessing. When Christ's kingdom is established under the administration of the glorified church, the whole world of mankind will be enlightened by the Word of God and the wonderful promises that are contained therein.

LIGHT MAKES MANIFEST

In his gospel, Luke captures the thought of increasing enlightenment as it will be seen by all men in due time. "No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad."—Luke 8:16,17

It is thus seen that the increasing light of our Lord's presence, having already enlightened and richly blessed the household of faith, will in due time cast light upon the sin-sick and dying human creation. At that time, the hidden things of darkness will 'be made

manifest,' and the 'secret' things of Truth will enlighten all who are obedient to the perfect law of God. Christ's kingdom will be established in righteousness and peace throughout all the earth. As the rev-elator has said, "He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen." (Rev. 1:7) This expresses the manner in which our Lord Jesus returned with clouds—secretly, invisibly, and unawares to a very dark world. Christ's kingdom will bring enlighten-ment to every man, and the time will come when all eyes shall see [discern] him, and all unrighteousness will be destroyed. ■