

In the Night Watches

“My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.”
—*Psalm 63:5,6*

PSALM 92:1 DECLARES that “It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD,” and to “sing praises” unto the “most High.” The more we learn about our God through an increasing understanding of his Word, the greater will be our desire to sing his praises. As our knowledge of him deepens into a personal acquaintance and fellowship with him, through the out-working of his providence in our lives and the fulfillment of his promises of grace to help in every time of need, it should make our lives flow in endless melodies of praise to the God of our salvation.

David is referred to in the Scriptures as a man after God’s own heart. (I Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22) In many of his psalms the sweet singer of Israel declares his love for the Lord and his delight in the law of his God. In one of them he writes: “The law

of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.”—Ps. 19:7-10

In our opening text, David speaks of meditating upon the Lord in the “night watches.” As he observed the peace and beauty of the night sky, it was these meditations that enabled him to write: “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.”—Ps. 8:3,4; 19:1,2

The hours from sundown to sunrise in David’s time presented a somewhat different situation than they do today. Now the lights of cities and towns, and other means of artificial illumination, very nearly turn night into day, with the result that the majority of people keep active, either in work or in pleasure, for such long hours that there is scarcely time left for quiet meditation.

This was not the case in David’s time. The flicker of a dim flame from the burning of olive oil was often the only means of securing light after the sun went down. With such limited light, the day’s activities came mostly to an end. As a result, there

was a much greater opportunity for thoughtful meditation upon the Lord in the evening hours, and for those who took advantage of this, many blessings were surely theirs.

In the case of David, while he was a shepherd boy, and later as leader of Israel's army, he no doubt spent many of his nights under the canopy of heaven. It was under these conditions that he rejoiced as he meditated upon the goodness of the Lord, and marveled at the wonders of creation. It would not be unreasonable to suppose that the subject matter of many of David's beautiful psalms took shape in his mind as he thus meditated during the night watches. How wonderfully such surroundings would prepare him for the influence of the Holy Spirit which guided him in his inspired writings.

FOR OUR LEARNING

David was truly a man of God, and the spirit of devotion and praise found in his writings is a sincere expression of a heart that had been given to the Lord. When he recorded the familiar words, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want," he was expressing his own feelings in the matter, giving utterance to his confidence in the keeping power of God.—Ps. 23:1

Beyond the expression of his own delight in the Lord, David was inspired by the Holy Spirit to pen messages peculiarly fitting to the needs of the people of God during the present age. Indeed, by divine providence, this is the chief purpose of his writings, even as it is of the writings of all the Old Testament prophets. As the apostles declare, these

faithful ones of the past wrote “for our learning” and “for our admonition.” “Not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister.”—Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:11; I Pet. 1:12

This being true, we might think of David’s experience of meditating upon the goodness of the Lord upon his bed during the night watches as having a counterpart even more blessed in our own experiences. As we contemplate this, we are reminded of something greater in the divine arrangement than literally lying upon a bed meditating upon the goodness of the Heavenly Father during the dark hours of a night, though such a practice is surely commendable and beneficial.

In God’s creative design there are seven “days,” or time periods. Each of these days began with an “evening” and closed with a “morning.” (Gen. 1:5,31) In each case the evening of the creative days symbolically marked an obscure beginning, with darkness settling down into a night, until the shining light of morning marked the closing portion of each period. Thus it was also when sin and death came upon the scene at the beginning of the seventh creative day. From then until now, the world has been passing through the long hours of a night of darkness. “Weeping” has continued throughout this symbolic night, David tells us, “but joy cometh in the morning.”—Ps. 30:5

RESTING BY FAITH

During this long night of weeping the world has been greatly distraught and unsettled. However, those who have had faith in the promises of God have enjoyed rest of mind and heart. This has been

particularly true of Jesus' footstep followers during the present Gospel Age. Paul wrote concerning these, saying, "We which have believed do enter into rest." (Heb. 4:3) We are keenly aware of the evil with which we are surrounded, and of the motions of sin in our flesh, but we place our faith in the finished work of Christ on our behalf. Furthermore, we know that through him and his kingdom all evil will eventually come to an end, and that even death itself will be destroyed.—I Cor. 15:22-26

Thus we are at rest. It is both a rest "by" faith, and also a rest, as the Scriptures declare, in the "most holy faith." (Jude 1:20) The foundation of both aspects of our rest is the meritorious sacrifice of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Based upon the value of his shed blood are all the various features of God's plan of salvation—the heavenly calling of the church, the hope of restitution for the world, and the assurance that evil will not rise up the second time.

All this, and more, is contained in our "most holy faith," that wonderful outline of the divine plan and purpose in which we find peace of mind and rest of heart. No matter how dark the night, nor how far distant the morning hours at times may seem, we can continue to rest in the spiritual comfort of the Bible's promises, and while we rest, continue to sing the praises of our God.

This wonderful knowledge we have is not because we are wiser than others, nor more worthy. Rather, it is because of God's abounding grace in permitting us to know something of "the mystery of the kingdom of God." (Mark 4:11) Surely this is great cause for rejoicing, and for praising our Heavenly Father. Now, while the darkness brings fear and perplexity

to most in the world, we are privileged to rest upon the soul-satisfying understanding of God's Word which he has provided for us!

RESTING BUT AWAKE

Our rest of faith in Christ, and in the great plan of God of which he is the center, is not designed to induce sleep. While we are resting in our appreciation of the Word of Truth during the world's dark night of sin, sorrow and death, we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Concerning this Paul wrote, "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. 5:5,6

The phrase "let us watch and be sober" is a reminder of our text, in which David speaks of the night watches. In order to watch during the nighttime hours one has to be awake and alert. Literal night watching is a very old institution, unfortunately made necessary because of the sin and selfishness of fallen man. Darkness serves as a kind of natural protection for prowlers, thieves, opposing armies, or whoever would rob another or inflict damage upon him or his property. As an offset to this, and prior to the advent of modern security cameras and electronic alarm systems, watchmen would often be stationed to detect the approach or presence of enemies, and to sound an alarm.

A watchman would fail in his duty if he fell asleep. It is not his privilege, during the night, to "sleep, as do others." Rather, he is to watch and be sober. As Christians, this is our position during the nighttime of sin and death. We are "watchers"

in Zion, and we should keep alert and be on guard against the approach of enemies of whatever nature they might be which would rob us, or others of the Lord's people, of their heritage in Christ Jesus.

Paul continues, "They that sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation." (I Thess. 5:7,8) This is symbolic language. To "sleep" suggests spiritual lethargy, and to be "drunken" indicates an intoxication by false theories, doctrines, and worldly interests.

We can avoid these conditions, the apostle reveals, by "putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation." In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul admonishes us to "put on the whole armour of God," that we may be able "to stand against the wiles of the devil."—Eph. 6:11

God's word of Truth, in its many aspects, and in its various applications in our lives, is the Christian's armor. The very teachings of the Scriptures in which we find peace and joy and rest are also our protection against the insidious attacks of the Adversary during these dark hours of the night. Indeed, this is one of the purposes for which the Lord has given us an understanding of his Word.

NOT IN DARKNESS

Among the important truths which guard the Christian's heart and life today is a knowledge of the times in which we are living. It is this that Paul speaks of particularly when reminding us of our

privileges as watchmen. He states: “Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For 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.” —I Thess. 5:1-4

The reason the “day of the Lord” does not overtake the “brethren” as a “thief in the night” is because they are awake and faithfully watching. In this lesson Paul is closely following the thoughts presented by Jesus concerning the time of his return and resulting “presence,” and of the “end of the age.” (Matt. 24:3, *The Emphatic Diaglott*) Jesus said, referring to a possible advance knowledge of his coming, “Of that day and hour knoweth no man.” (vs. 36) For this reason he admonished his disciples to watch.

Although Jesus said that no one would know in advance the specific time of his coming, he alluded to the fact that his return and subsequent presence would be like that of a “thief.” (vs. 43) Emphasizing this, Paul spoke of the day of the Lord coming as a “thief in the night.” Thus he could say to the Thessalonian brethren there was “no need” to write to them anything further at that time about “the times and the seasons,” for he knew they had confidence in what Jesus had said on the subject, a small portion of which the apostle had just repeated for emphasis.

The thief-like coming of the day of the Lord was to be true only so far as the outside world was

concerned. Jesus' footstep followers would not be "in darkness," Paul insisted, and that day would not overtake them "as a thief." When Jesus gave his great lesson pertaining to the time of his return and second presence, admonishing his disciples to watch because they did not know the day nor the hour, he did not say that their faithful watching would be rewarded by a discernment of his return and the beginning of the day of the Lord during their present lifetime. The same was true of Paul's words. It was the brethren's responsibility to be awake, alert, and to watch. If they did so, "that day," when it came, would not overtake them as a thief, but various prophetic "signs" would have their fulfillment and give evidence that the Lord had returned.

Such recognition could be true only of those who are awake. The world, still asleep in darkness, would be unaware of the signs indicating that the day of the Lord had come. Concerning the watchers who would be living at this time, and to whom, because of their faithfulness, the Lord would reveal his presence, Daniel wrote, "Blessed is he that waiteth." —Dan. 12:12

Earlier in this same chapter the prophet tells us that this "waiting" is for "Michael"—one of many names which refers to Jesus—to "stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people." Three signs are then given which point to the time at which Michael would stand up, that is, the time of our Lord's return and resulting presence. "There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation;" "Many shall run to and fro;" and "knowledge shall be increased."

(vss. 1,4) The fulfillment of these and other signs mentioned in the Scriptures, as indicated by world events, we believe signify that we are living at the time of Christ's second presence.

Blessed indeed is the David class in this most climactic time! From the human outlook it is a very dark period. In this darkness there is fear and apprehension. So frustrated is human wisdom at the present hour that social and political conflict and upheavals are feared even more than war. It is the time referred to in Psalm 46:1-3, when the symbolic "earth" is being "removed," and when the "mountains" are being "carried into the midst of the sea." However, we will not fear, David assures. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble," during this time of great turmoil in the world. When on every hand there is unrest, nervous apprehension, chaos, and distress, we have the blessed assurance of peace and rest, but only in the Lord.

If we keep properly awake during these dark hours, watching the progressive events in the great plan of God, the very things which increase the world's fears should make our rest more complete. For among the things we see as watchers in Zion is the near approach of morning. Indeed, the "morning star" has already appeared, and through the din and confusion incident to the removal of Satan's world, we discern the gray streaks of dawn!—Rev. 22:16; II Pet. 1:19

SINGING ALOUD

Surely, as David wrote, our souls are "satisfied as with marrow and fatness." The rich feast of spiritual food, which Jesus called "meat in due season," and

indicated would be another sign of his presence, has been abundantly served to the household of faith during the end of the age. (Matt. 24:45) It satisfies our longings as nothing else could do. It is as manna from heaven—sweet, nourishing, and soul-satisfying.

When we think of the many blessings which the Lord has so abundantly bestowed upon us, we cannot help, while resting upon our beds during the night watches, to sing aloud the praises of our God. We are resting but not sleeping, and we sing the “song of Moses” and “the Lamb.”—Rev. 15:3

In Psalm 92:1, where David says, “It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD,” he also speaks of showing forth his “lovingkindness.” (vs. 2) We give thanks to God in our personal and collective prayers to him, but we show forth his praises when we speak of his loving-kindness to others. To sing the high praises of God calls for activity in making known the glorious Gospel of the kingdom.

This is the great privilege of all who have been called out of darkness into the marvelous light of God’s plan. We rejoice in the fatness, the richness of the “meat in due season” upon which it is our privilege to feed. Resting in the night watches we delight to meditate upon the goodness of the Lord, and to give thanks to him for his boundless grace.

However, this should not be all. The result of our meditations should be a bursting forth in song which the Lord has given us to sing. When we take into consideration all that God is doing for us, how can we keep from singing? Surely we will want to praise the Lord with joyful lips, and sing forth the Gospel refrain!

In Psalm 92:3 David speaks of praising the Lord “upon an instrument of ten strings.” We might think of these strings as representing the various fundamental doctrines of God’s plan. It is the beautiful harmony of these doctrines, when these strings are played upon by those who have learned the new song, that really brings praise to our God.

These teachings reveal the wisdom, justice, love and power of our God, which, blended in perfect harmony and unison, make up his glory. It is our privilege now to show forth this glory, while, resting in faith, we joyfully contemplate the time now nearing when a knowledge of the Heavenly Father’s glory will fill the whole earth “as the waters cover the sea.” “Praise ye the LORD!”—Hab. 2:14; Ps. 150:6 ■