

# The Promise of Christ's 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

## THE NIGHT BEFORE HE

died, our Lord and Savior gave to his disciples some vitally important information concerning events which would soon take place. He explained that it would be necessary for him to leave them for a while, 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.”—vs. 3

## EXHORTATION TO WATCH

Our featured Scripture, and the context from which it has been selected, implies that it was then unknown as to when 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 signs of this event, although its precise time was not stated. Mark’s account implies that it would not be until Christ’s return had already occurred that it 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 recognized by those who were watching for the signs of 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) Paul’s emphasis concerns the “children of light,” who would be watching and enlightened as a result of the teachings and prophetic statements of Jesus and his faithful apostles.

## **FAITHFULLY WATCHING**

Some Christian people have been offended and stumbled respecting the Master’s teaching concerning his promised Second Coming: [Greek: *parousia*, or presence; see Matt. 24:3, *Young’s Literal Translation*].

This has sometimes resulted because of unreasonable and literal viewpoints concerning the manner and purpose of his invisible presence. We are not at liberty, however, to reject one of the most beautiful and prominent teachings of the Scriptures simply because others may have erred respecting the subject. Some may erroneously bring a certain amount of worldly wisdom upon anything connected with the teachings of Christ's return.

This doctrine is a vital part 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 Coming 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. (Gal. 3:8,16,27-29) These promises have been established upon the testimony of the prophets, apostles, and by Christ Jesus himself. Many honest-hearted Christian people have loved and appreciated these teachings. They hold a most prominent place in their hearts, while others may see no real importance to the subject.

The watching of the Lord's people has been for the return of him who redeemed us, and who promised,

“I will come again, and receive you unto myself.” (John 14:3) The word “receive,” as used here by John, means “to take near or alongside 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 [Greek: hold fast] what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.” Paul also 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.”—vss. 2,3

## **BLESSINGS FROM THE PROMISED SEED**

The groaning creation has long awaited, though mostly unknowingly, for the glorious future kingdom of righteousness and peace, and for the completion 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 since the Day of Pentecost. These 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.—Rom. 8:16,17; II Tim. 2:10-12; Rev. 3:21

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 waiting, as well as an expectant hope. We are waiting for that of which the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to Titus: “Waiting [Greek: with confidence] for the blessed hope and manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (Titus 2:13, *Young’s Literal Translation*) During the process of testing and proving his footstep followers, the Lord transforms them from the flesh to his own spiritual image and likeness. “We all, ... are changed into the same image from glory to glory.” John further states: “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.”—II Cor. 3:18; I John 3:2

Christians who are proven to be faithful unto death will be resurrected as spirit beings. They will be like Jesus, 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 present waiting and hoping time is also one of tribulation and trial, not only for the world which lies under the yoke of sin and the blinding influences of Satan, but also for faithful Christians. Of these the apostle writes: “Ourselves also, who have the

firstfruits of the spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our placement as sons, to wit, the redemption [or deliverance] of our body.”—Rom. 8:23, *Revised Version Improved and Corrected*

Many students of the Bible have come to appreciate the fulfillment of the prophetic signs that indicate we are living at the time of our Lord’s Second Coming and resulting invisible presence. Paul pointed out the importance of understanding the invisible nature of this Day of the Lord. “Yourselves have known thoroughly that the day of the Lord as a thief in the night doth so come.” (I Thess. 5:2, *YLT*) Its dawning cannot be discerned with the natural eye. If the Second Coming of Christ 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. In that case, it would not be true that the Day of the Lord comes as a “thief” unawares to the world, because all would know it.

## **GOD’S WORD—OUR LAMP**

We are to watch the signs of the times, and do so in the light of God’s Word. The present age has surely been a nighttime, and the Lord’s people have been waiting for the Master to return as promised. Speaking prophetically of God’s care over his people at this present time, the psalmist wrote: “Since God is in her midst, she will not be shaken. God will help her at the break of dawn.”—Ps. 46:5, *International Standard Version*

The Word of God has been the guiding light for the pathway of faithful Christians, as expressed by David, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” (Ps. 119:105) The lamp, as it has revealed

Truth, has guided all of the faithful, watchful pilgrims in their journey toward the celestial city—the heavenly Jerusalem. (Heb. 12:22) What a comfort it has been, and how dark and dreary would our pilgrim journey have been without it. As the words of the hymn express, “Looking back, I’ll praise the way Thou hast led me, led me, day by day,” by the light of Truth.

## **SIGNS OF THE TIMES**

Those who have taken heed to the landmarks pointed out by God through his prophets of the Old Testament as well as through Jesus and the apostles, realize that we have already come on a much longer journey than was expected by the church when first she started out nearly 2,000 years ago at Pentecost. However, we realize also from these landmarks that we have now approached very near to the end of this period in God’s plan, and to the time when the great blessing, which his people have so long waited and prayed for, is at hand. The watchers have noted God’s testimony through the Prophet Daniel that this “time of the end” would be a period when “many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.”—Dan. 12:4

The alert watchers are not indifferent to the fulfillment of prophecy that is to be seen at the present time. Others may be aware of our changing world, but the child of God discerns the changes not only as facts but also as a clear indication that we are living in the foretold “time of the end,” that is, the end of this “present evil age.” (Gal. 1:4, *ISV*) It is also a time 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 invisible presence brings an increase of conflict 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) “Michael” in Daniel’s prophecy refers to our Lord Jesus, the “archangel,” or chief angel, who would “stand up,” symbolically speaking, at the time of his return.—Jude 1:9; I Thess. 4:16

The faithful watchers, seeking to know whether these things are being fulfilled, recognize the chaos and level of violence that marks our day as a climactic time in the plan of God. They also put their trust in God that they will be “delivered” in this “time of trouble.” The Scriptures distinctly declare that all present human institutions will be shaken and descend into anarchy, confusion, and chaos, in preparation for God’s kingdom of righteousness, peace, and blessing.—Heb. 12:26-28; II Pet. 3:10-13

## **ALL SHALL PRAISE HIM**

The children of God do not lose sight of our Heavenly Father or his providence. They see that the approaching fall of the present world order 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 it is sure to come, and are thus able to discern God’s times and seasons. 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. “When that one, the spirit of truth, is come, it shall guide you into all the truth: for it shall not speak from itself; but what things soever it shall hear, these shall it speak: and it shall declare unto you the things that are to come.”—John 16:13, *RVIC*

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 placed in the hands of his Son, Christ Jesus, and his elect church, whose exaltation will be for the purpose of blessing all of mankind. The watchers note that our Lord Jesus promised to provide his footstep followers with a comprehensive outline of Truth—“meat in due season”—at the very time of his promised return, in preparation for his long-awaited kingdom.—Matt. 24:45,46; Luke 12:42-44

## **LIGHT MAKES MANIFEST**

In his Gospel, Luke captures the thought of increasing enlightenment as it will be seen by all people 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

In harmony with the foregoing words of our Lord, *The Dawn* magazine has used as its subtitle, *A Herald of Christ's Presence*, for nine decades. It has been the great privilege of the publisher to not only point our readers to the evidences of the Lord's invisible presence during this “time of the end,” but also to herald far and wide the glorious blessings to soon come to the entire world by means of the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. Indeed, the increasing light of our Lord's presence, having already enlightened and richly blessed the household of faith, will soon, we believe, cast its light upon the sin-sick and dying human creation.

God's kingdom, under Christ's rulership, will soon be established in righteousness and peace throughout all the earth. As John the Revelator wrote: “Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall perceive him.” (Rev. 1:7, *RVIC*) This expresses the manner in which our Lord Jesus has returned—with clouds—secretly and invisibly to a very dark world. Christ's kingdom, however, will bring enlightenment to all people—“every eye” shall discern him—and all unrighteousness will be destroyed. Therefore, let us each look forward to this joyous answer to the oft-repeated prayer, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”—Matt. 6:10 ■