

“And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.” Mark 13:37

Of that day and that hour knoweth no man

The text from the gospel of Mark that is the theme for this presentation contains the words of Jesus. Jesus was speaking about the end times. Although he gave many signs of the end times, he also concluded that no person knows the day and the hour of the end of the world and the second coming of Jesus.

For that reason, Jesus instructed, “Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. 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: lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch” (Mark, 13:33-37).

Nobody knows when the end of the world will come Likewise nobody knows the day and the hour of their own death. For that reason, it is of utmost importance to be watchful.

Watchfulness

To be watchful means to be ready. It means that we expect that what we are awaiting could happen at any moment.

Prophet Ezekiel described the watchman’s role: “But if the watchman see the sword, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman’s hand” (Ezek. 33:6). God has placed those in His kingdom who are responsible for the spiritual care of His children. They watch on the walls of Zion and warn of dangers.

As a young man, I enjoyed being in the woods and hunting for deer. I was once given advice by an experienced hunter. He said that you should always hunt as if there is a deer very near. That way you are always careful and alert and watchful.

It is good if we can in the same way remain alert for the enemy of souls. He is always going about “seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). And he is always near, even in our own flesh.

As prophet Ezekiel instructed, we want to watch for dangers to our brothers and sisters in faith. We indeed are one another’s keepers and help each other to preserve faith and a good conscience.

For that reason, if we see that the enemy is tempting a brother or sister in some matter, we want to warn them in love for their undying soul.

Personal Watching

Watching in faith is also a personal matter. We know that there are many dangers and temptations in the midst of this world. The dangers are to the right and left of our path. There are dangers of self-righteousness, and there are dangers of leniency and permissiveness.

We often say that we have a threefold enemy. That includes the devil, the world, and our own flesh. Luther has said that of the three he fears his own flesh the most. We also remember how Apostle Paul wrote of himself, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. . . O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:18-20, 24). Don’t we often feel the same way?

Today, the world is a cold and dark place in many ways. The ungodly life in the world surrounds us. At times, the world can feel so close to us. The enemy of souls is so clever and deceitful. The believers have often said that the enemy is the master of a thousand tricks. Already centuries ago, Apostle James wrote, “. . .whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God . . . submit yourselves therefore unto God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:4,7).

Also, life today is so busy. In our age of communication, transportation, and entertainment, we can get caught up in the busy pace of life. Then we can become unwatchful or sleepy in our faith.

Jesus took the disciples James, John, and Peter with him when he went to the garden. He left them to watch while he went a little farther to pray. When he returned, he found the disciples asleep. Jesus said, “What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:40-41).

Like the disciples, we can become sleepy. It is not always easy to be watchful in faith. Though we have the desire to preserve faith and a good conscience and our spirit is willing, our flesh is weak. How then can we remain watchful faith?

Remaining Watchful

Believers experience temptations and trails in their lives. Apostle James writes, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into diverse temptations; knowing this that the trying of your faith worketh patience. . . . Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (James 1:2,3,12).

Thus we see that we are not exempt from temptation. Jesus said to His own, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Nevertheless, the child of God often feels weak in the face of temptation and doubts of his or her own salvation. We know that the enemy wishes, through temptations, to draw us into sin and to lead us away from God's kingdom.

James writes of this. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:13-15).

What then can help us to resist temptation and sin? We know that the source of strength for the endeavor of faith is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the gospel that frees us from sin and gives us power to believe. Yet, God also helps us in other ways to resist temptation.

- Listen to God's Word.

God's word is the bread and water of life for a child of God. It is our source of strength and comfort. It is the light that enlightens our pathway. Through His word, God instructs us and guides us. Today, God blessed us with many opportunities to be in the hearing of His word. We want to treasure those opportunities.

- Discuss our temptations with other believers.

God's word teaches us, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). Our brothers and sisters in faith are our escorts that help us in our endeavor of faith.

When we are burdened or tempted, we can seek out a trusted brother or sister with whom we can speak about our temptations. Such trusted friends will listen and understand. They will keep our confidences, and they will give us counsel. Apostle James encourages us, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed" (James 5:16).

- Care for the conscience.

Apostle Paul encourages his younger brother Timothy to hold faith and a good conscience (1 Tim. 1:19). The conscience of a believer is an inner voice that warns us about sin. The conscience can become dimmed by sin. When sin accumulates on the conscience, the conscience becomes less sensitive to sin. For that reason, the child of God wants to care for the conscience.

How does one care for the conscience? It is by putting away sin and believing sins forgiven in the names and blood of Jesus. God's word encourages us, "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1). When we feel the weight of our sinfulness, we can ask to hear the gospel. In the hearing of the gospel, we can believe that our sins are forgiven.

Sometimes, we carry such a sin upon the conscience that is especially troubling to us. Then, we have the grace privilege of confession. We can go to a trusted brother or sister to whom we can speak of those particular sins that trouble us, and we can hear the forgiving message of the gospel for even that particular sin. Apostle John writes, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

- Choose a believing, and soundly believing, group of companions.

In Ecclesiastes it is written: “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up” (Eccl. 4:9-10).

The “cloud of witnesses” that surrounds us that is mentioned in the letter to the Hebrews consists of our fellow believers. They can lift us up with the gospel when we fall into sin. They can also warn us of the dangers of sin and help us to avoid temptation and sin. That is why it is so important that our close companions are themselves sincerely believing. Then we can freely speak of faith and of our trials. They will not encourage us to do sin but will help us to resist the temptations of the devil.

Such friends are great treasures. When Apostle Paul wrote to his believing brothers and sisters in Philippi, he addresses them, “My brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown” (Phil 4:1). Haven’t you also felt that way about your believing friends? When we have had difficult times in our lives, then we have especially known the value of sincerely believing friends.

- Choose only good reading and listening materials.

Apostle John warns “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (1 John 2:15). He especially warns about the “lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). We have experienced how the enemy can try to approach our flesh through reading, listening and viewing material that arouses our flesh. For that reason, the believers have felt that there is a special place of watching in these matters.

On the other hand, wholesome reading and listening material can serve to uplift us and to also teach us about life. Often such material can help us pass our free time and to uplift and comfort us in times of need. For that reason, we consider the availability of good reading and listening material as a gift of God. It is important to choose wisely and in keeping with our goal of holding faith and a good conscience.

- Choose good and developmental hobbies.

Luther taught that idle time provides the devil opportunity to do his work. A significant part of our lives is spent in recreational, or free time, activity. The “hang-outs” of the people of the world are not good places for believers to spend their time. Rather, it is beneficial to have good and developmental hobbies that we can enjoy in our free time. Such hobbies might include playing musical instruments, a variety of health recreational activities, handwork, art, and wood work, among many other choices.

God gives different talents to each of us. Such free time activities allow us to use and develop the talents He has given. They also allow us to pass our free time in ways that we can enjoy and help us to avoid temptations.

Believing for Today

The believers often say that faith is one day old. Yesterday's faith is past and cannot save us. We cannot believe for tomorrow. It is therefore important that we are believing today.

When Jesus spoke of His second coming, He said "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when he think not" (Luke 12:37-40).

If you knew today that this was your last day on this earth, wouldn't it be your main concern today that you are believing. Everything else would become unimportant in comparison. You would want to have the assurance of the gospel that all of your sins are forgiven and you are a child of God and acceptable to Heaven. For that reason, we say that it is important to remain personally watchful in faith and to help each other.

Remember the destination and the reward. I remember learning to cross country ski and how difficult it was to go uphill. The skis always seemed to slide back. One experienced skier told me that you need to keep your eyes on the top of the hill and not look down at your skis. That keeps you properly balanced and helps to prevent slipping back. I have thought that it is likewise important on our journey of faith that we look toward the destination. Our destination is Heaven. Our treasure is there; our hearts are there. There we want to be one day. It pays to believe.

Remember dear brothers and sisters, that the power to believe is found in the gospel. We cannot boast that we have been such watchful travelers. Many times, the enemy is successful in causing sin to beset and slow our journey. But God's grace is abundant. By grace, through faith, by the power of the gospel, the weak traveler can continue the journey. Faults and sins are forgiven in the name and blood of Jesus. The home in Heaven awaits.

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