

*Simprin, February 16, 1707.*

CHRISTIAN WATCHFULNESS STATED, AND ENFORCED.

SERMON XXXV.

MARK xiii. 37,

*And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.*

THESE words are the conclusion of our Lord's discourse, begun at the 5th verse of this chapter. Here he tells them the design of speaking these things, that they were not designed for them alone who heard them, but for all others, that minded to be his followers. What things does he mean? The text refers to the whole preceding discourse, the word being in the plural number; and so it refers to watching, which he had before pressed upon them, and now presses again.

DOCTRINE. It is the duty of all to watch. For illustrating this, I shall,

I. Shew what it is to watch.

II. I shall, under several branches, speak of the object of watching.

III. I shall enforce the doctrine, by giving reasons why we should watch. I am then,

I. To shew what it is to watch.

Watching is a military term. By watching, the army is secured from a surprise by the enemy. It properly belongs to the body to watch, because it only is properly subject to sleep. Even this bodily watching may be religious, 2 Cor. vi. 5; Psal. lxxiii. 6; but it is commonly used in scripture for the watching of the soul, which is subject to a spiritual sleep. There are two things in it,

1. The soul's keeping spiritually awake, for to watch is opposed to sleeping. When Jesus found his disciples sleeping, "he said unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? Couldst thou not watch one hour?" The time of our being in the world is night, Rom. xiii. 12, and it is very natural to sleep in the night; "for they that sleep, sleep in the night." But we must not sleep, but be awake; that is, keep grace in exercise. We must keep from carnal security and spiritual sloth, which are very apt to creep in upon us, after the greatest enjoyment and appearances of God, Song v. 3. This is a sweet sin, in which a man will take pleasure, when other sins give him no satisfaction. We must also keep the soul in spiritual motion and

holy exercise. When we sleep we rest. Our rest is not here, and therefore we must be always moving heavenwards. As the fire on the altar was kept always burning, so we must be always watching. If we begin to droop, we must rouse ourselves.

2. Observation. The sentinel that walketh the round, unless he carefully observe what he may see, cannot be said to watch. Thus the shepherds kept watch over their flocks by night, Luke ii. 8. Our mind must be intent upon our business, that we may catch all advantages against, and ward off hazard from the enemy. Hence watching is expressed by taking heed, and by looking to ourselves, 1 Cor. x. 12; 2 John 8. We are now,

II. Under several branches to speak of the object of watching. The branches are these three,

I. Some things we must watch over to keep them right.

II. Some things we must watch against.

III. Some things we must watch for.

I. There are some things we must watch over to keep them right.

1. Watch over yourselves. "Only," said Moses, "take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life." Every man is his own nearest neighbour, and so his worst enemy is nearest to him. None capable to do us so much harm.

Watch then over your heads, your principles, 1 Tim. iv. 1. The spirit of delusion rageth. New doctrines are very enticing to those that have not had the spiritual relish, and felt the efficacy of the old upon their hearts, 2 Tim. iv. 3, and iii. 4. When the truth is not received with love, the spirit of delusion leads men to believe a lie.

Watch over your hearts. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." The heart is the source of action. It is as the eye to the body. "If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness." The same may be said of the heart. There is, then, the greatest need for watching it, "for it is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." He would act foolishly, who desiring to keep the water pure, would sit down by the streams, neglecting the fountain. To watch the outward man and not the heart, is to shut the door and the thief in the house.

The thoughts of the heart must be watched. "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved: how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee." Thus David declares, "I hate vain thoughts." Thoughts are the births of our

hearts, and we had need to watch, and observe of what sort they are, and stifle evil thoughts in the womb, lest through unwatchfulness they swarm forth and defile the whole man, Mark viii. 20—23. One wandering thought has been a wide door at which the soul's life and vigour in duties have gone out, being as a dart struck through the heart of a bird singing on a tree.

Watch also the affections of the heart. Good ones are easily crushed, and evil ones, like bad weeds, grow up apace, Song ii. 15. O! how ready are our affections to go astray, either on unlawful, or else immoderately on lawful objects; and when once set on, they run along, as the fire in the train, Eccl. vi. 9. Therefore, watch your hearts. He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down and without walls.

Watch over your tongues. "If any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." It is dangerous to ride on an unbridled horse. David said, "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me." "Again," said he, "set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, keep the door of my lips." The tongue boasteth great things. It is apt to fall into undue silence, or sinful speaking. A single word may be of dreadful consequence. "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." The unruliness of the tongue it seems had cast the rich man in hell into a burning fever, where no cooling was to be expected, Luke xvi. 24.

Your senses must be watched. These are the gates of the soul, and when the town is besieged, strict watch must be kept at the gates. Satan lays his trains at these gates; if they be not guarded, the whole soul may be set on fire. The senses of hearing and seeing, must in an especial manner be watched. By the eyes and ears did the devil blow up all mankind in Adam and Eve. The eyes ruined Achan, and wounded David severely. Job was glad to make a covenant with them.

Watch over your feet, your walk and conversation. We are exhorted "to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise." We should walk wisely, noticing every step. "We must watch in all things," for we are ready to stumble in all things. We must not walk at random; "but in all our ways acknowledge the Lord, and he shall direct our paths.

2. Watch over your graces. Grace is that fire sent down from heaven into the hearts of sinners, which must not be neglected, 2 Tim. i. 6. Our graces are subject to decay, though not to death.

Though grace cannot die out of the garden of the heart, when once it is implanted, yet it may be overgrown and hid. It is a great pledge of the Lord's love and every way precious, therefore to be watched, seeing it is in hazard.

3. Watch over your duties. Take heed how you hear, how you read, pray, meditate and communicate. Remember what Paul says, "I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me." Unwatchfulness in duties, makes them useless, like a man shooting an arrow at random. We should watch the outward man in duty. Men cannot pray sleeping, nor hear when gazing around them. Watch the inward man the soul, that it behave rightly. Satan is ready to cast a dead fly into the ointment to spoil all, or to send the birds flocking to the carcase. See how David set himself to his duty, "My voice," said he, "shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up."

4. Watch over your attainments. "Look," says John, "to yourselves, that we lose not those things we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." If it were but a weak spark of grace, "yet be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die." If it were but a conviction, let us say with David, "my sin is ever before me." "Quench not the Spirit." Do not let out the fire, by neglecting it. The cloud like a man's hand, if cherished, may ere long cover the heavens. See how watchful the spouse was, when she had found Christ, "I charge you," said she, "O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love till he please."

II. There are some things we must watch against.

1. Watch against your lusts and corruptions. In an especial manner let us watch against the sin of our nature, called the old man, and by us usually the evil heart; that woful bent of our souls to evil, the body of sin, Rom. vii. 24. This reigns as a king in the unregenerate; and in the regenerate it is dethroned, but still endeavours to get the throne again, and in the meantime endeavours to command. "Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body, that they should obey it in the lusts thereof."

Watch against your former sins, with which you were sometimes led away, and have been engaging against. "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance." Your former loves will make suit again to you, and be in on you, if you watch not. Remember you are naturally bent to backslide, and, like Israel, to follow after your lovers; therefore look not back to Sodom.

Watch against your particular sins, to which you find yourselves most inclined. The strongest guard should always be at the weakest part of the wall. Every man has his weak side, his "sin that doth most easily beset him." Take notice of this by all means, and endeavour to lay it aside, that each may be able to say with David, "I kept myself from mine iniquity."

Watch against little sins. The proverb is, the little thief makes least noise, but opens the door to the rest. An improper look to Bathsheba, in the end broke David's bones. A little sleep brings on want as an armed man.

2. Watch against appearances of evil, 1 Thess. v. 22. Neither do evil, nor what appears to be evil. Such as neglect this rule, offend and stumble others, and so offend God. They grieve the godly, and harden the wicked.

3. Against occasions of sin. It is difficult and dangerous for a man to walk with bags of powder among sparks. Peter in the high priest's hall, fell into a grievous sin. "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away." Sin has a lodging within, and wants but an occasion to call it forth, and therefore starve your lusts, by fleeing from occasions of sinning.

4. Watch against temptations to sin. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. You live amidst many snares. Be upon your guard, that you may resist when tempted, and throw not yourselves in the way of temptation. You cannot expect to escape temptations while here. God will have you tried, and temptations will easily lead aside the unwary.

5. Against evil company. A man is known by his company, and is always in some degree influenced by it. Evil communications corrupt good manners. He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

III. There are some things we must watch for, as men watching for advantages against the enemy, and for strengthening themselves.

1. Watch for the proper season of duty. "Praying always," says Paul, "with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints." There is an opportunity for doing good, Gal. vi. 10, which, if not embraced, may do much harm. "To every thing there is a season." This may come and pass too without improvement, if a man be not watching. Many a fair child is lost by an untimely birth, and many a good duty is spoiled for want of doing it in its season. Every thing is beautiful in its season.

2. Watch for the motions of the Spirit. He is an unwise mariner that takes not heed to wind and tide. He can neither command them when he will, nor set out to sea without them. If a man be so happy as to watch the blowings of the Spirit, he may make good progress; otherwise, he may do much to little purpose. As soon as God revealed himself, "Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped. And he said, if now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us, (for it is a stiff-necked people), and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance."

3. Watch for experiences, by observing carefully the dispensations of providence towards you. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." An observing Christian is rich in experience. "For thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work; I will triumph in the works of thy hand." Providence is every day big with advantage to the observing Christian. Sometimes it brings him a reproof, light, comfort, evidence of God's faithfulness, and such like things; but the unwatchful let all these escape.

4. Watch the success of your duties. David resolved not only that God should hear his voice in the morning, but also that he would look up for an answer. Observe how you succeed at a prayer, a sermon, or at a communion. The prayer that is not looked after, is not likely to reach God's ears. Alas! many go to God in duties, as children at their play come and knock at people's doors, and presently run away to their play again.

III. We are to enforce the doctrine, by giving reasons why we should watch.

1. Because God commands it, and that very often. He hath set us to our post, and we must watch and not sleep.

2. Because we have the enemy within our walls. A deceitful heart, with strong and deceitful lusts. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Therefore, says Solomon, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool, but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered." How can men sleep sound, when they know that cut-throats are within their houses? Thou hast within thee what will ruin thee, if thou watch not, though the devil should never attack thee. A man's enemies are those of his own house.

3. Because there are snares laid for us every where, by the devil and the world. Therefore, says Paul, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise." There is no place where Satan has not his traps set for thee. In the wilderness he tempted

Christ; he tempted Eve when alone, and Peter in company. There are snares in thy lawful enjoyments, visible and invisible. Our time is like to be a time of snares, we have need to watch. Remember Jesus hath said, "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."

4. Because no duty can be done right, where this is wanting. If we would pray aright, "we must watch and pray." If we would hear aright, "we must take heed how we hear." If we would stand fast, "we must take heed lest we fall." As a servant must be awake if he would do any piece of work, so must a Christian.

USE 1.—Of reproof to the unwatchful. Alas! it is to be feared some of us have fallen asleep already. I will tell you how you will know it.

1. A silent conscience is a sign of a sleeping soul. When David cut off Saul's skirt, his heart smote him, for he was then awake; but when he committed murder, his conscience was silent till Nathan came to him, for he was asleep.

2. A dreaming man is asleep. Is thy heart saying peace, like Agag thinking the bitterness of death is past. Thou hast received the communion, and hast entered into engagements, and art not seeing the hazard of breaking your vows. I tell thee thou art sleeping in thy fetters. A waking Christian has his hazard always before him.

3. Loss of impressions of the work in which thou hast been engaged. A waking man finds the bands that are on him, but one asleep is insensible of them. Ah! how soon are they lost. The Israelites "soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel."

4. Laziness and heartlessness in going about duties. The spouse says, "By night on my bed, I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not." How art thou now at thy duties?

*Lastly*, Forgetting of your work. Many that engage with Christ, are like servants called on by the master to do such service, they promise, but fall asleep, and forget it. "When Jesus found his disciples sleeping, he said unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? Couldst not thou watch one hour?" Are all your vows and engagements turned to that already?

USE 2. Watch at this time, and at all times.

MOTIVE 1. Consider your danger. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." You are in hazard of falling into sin, even gross sins. There are many ditches in our way. If we watch not, we may be over head and ears, ere long. How did the

Israelites in the wilderness fall, notwithstanding their privileges. Peter fell very soon after the first communion. Many have so fallen, and so soon after a sacrament, that it would seem the devil had gone down with the sop. You are in danger of falling under God's displeasure: "But with many of them, God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness." Unwatchfulness opens the door to sin, sin to wrath. Where men's lusts dine with them, judgments will sup. "Behold," says Jesus, "I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."

2. God is watching you, his eyes are upon you at all times; on your thoughts, words, and actions, Psal. cxxxix. The thief surely had need to watch his hands while in the sight of the judge.

3. The devil never sleeps, but is watching for your ruin. "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." "But know this, that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up." Would Sisera have lain down to sleep had he known the hammer and nail were in Jael's hand. Satan stands at thy hand.

4. What thou hast lost by former unwatchfulness. Hast thou not decayed and been brought very low by, and lost great attainments, and wilt thou not be wise?

*Lastly*, Consider the shortness and uncertainty of your time. It is short, therefore the devil will be busy, and you have the more need to make haste. This laborious trade will be the sooner over. There is no watching in heaven. Christ has told us he will come, but not when, that we may always watch, Mark. xiii. 32—37.

**DIRECTIONS.** 1. Harbour no known sin in thy soul. This will stupify thy conscience.

2. Beware of immoderate affection to created enjoyments.

3. Crush security in the bud.

4. Keep up a sense of spiritual wants, and be daily travelling between Christ's fulness and your own emptiness. Amen.