

THE CHRISTIAN'S WATCH.*

Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching.—LUKE XII. 37.

THESE words are part of a sermon that Christ made to his disciples concerning worldly cares, and concerning mercy to those that stand in need. Now in the last place he gives directions concerning watching: 'Blessed are those servants that shall be found watching when their master cometh.'

It was the custom of servants in those times to stand at night to watch for their master's coming.

Here Christ compares himself to a man that is lately married, solacing himself, and preparing a place for his spouse, and leaving a servant at home to wait for his return. Christ is gone into heaven to solace himself, and to prepare a place for us, and will come again to receive us into heaven. In the mean time we are to watch: 'Blessed are those servants that are found watching when their master cometh.'

In these words we are to consider, first, our relation, that we are 'servants.'

And then our condition, we are servants appointed 'to watch for our master's coming,' for our Lord is not yet come.

This life is a condition of waiting. We are always waiting for something, till we are taken up to Christ.

'Blessed are those servants that their lord shall find watching.' And then there is the relation and condition of them also, they wait for the return of their master. And their carriage is suitable, to wit, watching.

And then the encouragement, 'Blessed are those servants, that their Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.'

1. Concerning the relation *of servants*, in a word, some are so by office, as magistrates and ministers; but all are servants as Christians. It was the best flower in David's garland to be a servant to the Lord; and it is so for every one, be they never so great in dignity, to serve God; for to serve him is to run into the most noble service of all; for all God's servants shall be kings, nay, they are kings.

* 'The Christian's Watch' and 'Coming of Christ' were appended to the Exposition of Philippians, c. iii. (4to, 1639). [See note, Vol. V. page 2.] They are from different texts, but, as being on the same subject, could not be well separated. Neither has a separate title-page, only the heading as above.—G.

And then it is a rich and most beneficial service; for we serve a Lord that will reward to a cup of cold water. It is not such a service as Pharaoh's was, to gather stubble ourselves; but he will enable us to do, and where we fail he will pardon, and when we do anything he will reward, and when our enemies oppress us he will take our parts.

Observe here how the Scripture speaketh, when we are servants, but do not our duty, and when we do it. When David had committed that sin in numbering the people, he said to Nathan, 'Go tell David,' 2 Sam. xii. 1; but when he had an intent to build a temple to the glory of God, then he said, 'Go tell my servant David,' 2 Sam. vii. 5. When we are doing our duty towards God, then we are his 'servants,' but when we are about other service, God will not own us. Israel were the people of God when they were good, but when they committed idolatry, then, 'Go tell thy people,' saith God to Moses, 'that thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt,' Deut. ix. 12. Let us therefore remember that we are God's servants, and if servants, then God will own us.

2. Now to go on: 'Blessed are those servants whom their Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching.'

We see here that there must be a constant waiting and watching for the coming of the Lord; whence we may learn *that it is the duty and office of every Christian constantly to watch and wait for the master's coming.*

Watching, you know, presupposes life; and hence first waking and then watching.

Sense springs from spiritual life, and then waking. All that have spiritual life are not all watchers, and all that wake do not watch. Waking is when the spirits return into the senses, and are in exercise. You know sleep binds up the senses; but when the spirits return the obstruction is dissolved.

And then there is waking when all the powers are in a readiness, and when there is a discession* of vapours that stopped the senses before.

So, then, waking is the return of the spirits, either by some motion, as stirring up the body, or by some great shining light. So it is in the spiritual life. The vapours causeth sleep, but the Spirit of God, scattering a light, awakens us. By this light is meant either the light of his judgments, or the light of his mercies, or the light of divine truth; for by all these sometimes we are awakened.

There is first a waking condition, and then we watch. I intend to speak of watching. Now waking is a preparation to this.

'Watching' is when upon waking all the powers and graces are in exercise, preparing for good and avoiding of evil.

Now, for bodily watching, we have nothing to do with that here, because here it is spiritually meant; but yet taken so far as the body is an instrument of the soul in the action both of soul and body. As, when the body is surprised with any inordinate affection of the blessings of God, then the soul is unfit for watching; and therefore it is specially meant of spiritual watching.

In the primitive church, they had watchings bodily and spiritually; for, being under the tyranny of the heathen emperor, they had not liberty to serve God in the day. But afterwards they had their vigils, watching times, called vigils, preparations, which were before the word and sacraments, or when there was any great business in hand. And when superstition grew, they had their vigils too; but they made laws to bind the people to observe them three times in a night; but their prayers were in Latin. It was a per-

* That is = discession, *i.e.* going away, departure.—G.

verse imitation of David, that rose at midnight to praise God; that was when he was stirred up upon some extraordinary occasion, when there was some danger or some other occasion near, not that he did it ordinarily. But we are fallen into a contrary course than the ancient church was, to spend whole nights in prayers; for we have those that spend whole days in sleep. We cannot watch one hour with Christ; but we can spend whole nights in vanity.

Doct. That which I mean to stand upon at this time shall be this: *that the carriage of a Christian in this world is an estate of watching till Christ come home.*

I will shew this by some reasons why it should be so, and give some directions how we must be in a waking condition.

Reason 1. The first reason is this: *because we are in danger of sin, and in danger by sin.* This occasions watching, especially being ever in danger of sin; and besides many other sins, that sin of drowsiness, deadness, and heaviness of spirit; for every man by experience finds this spiritual drowsiness hanging upon him sometimes more than other. Therefore we ought to have the soul in a better condition.

And then we are in danger by sin, and that is more than I can express; for by drowsiness oftentimes we fall into sins whereby we offend God and the good angels, and give Satan advantage, and grieve the good Spirit of God, and put a sting into all other troubles. Yea, sin makes the blessings of God which we enjoy, no blessings, and hinders us from praising God as we ought for his blessings. So that thus we may see we are in danger to sin and by sin. Therefore we have need to keep a spiritual watch.

Reason 2. Again, consider *in what relation we are in this world, and what the life of a Christian is compared unto.* We are travellers through our enemies' country. This is Satan's place where he reigns, being 'god of this world;' therefore we had need to have our wits and senses about us.

And then again, the worst enemy is within us, our own hearts; which joins with Satan to betray us to the world, he being the god of this world.

Now carrying an enemy in our own bosom, therefore we need to watch, for that is the condition of travellers through their enemies' country. We also carry a jewel, a soul, a precious jewel in a brittle glass. If once the vessel break, all is lost.

Reason 3. And then again, *we run in a race.* Now those that run need have the goal in their eye, the price* of their high calling; they had need look upon that which may encourage them. And of all men runners need be watchful. We are all runners; therefore you see the necessity of a watch.

Reason 4. Again, our whole life is not only a race but a warfare. And of all conditions a warfare needs watching; for we have enemies to fight against that never sleeps. Satan our enemy never sleeps, 'but goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour,' 1 Peter v. 8. We sleep, but Satan sleeps not, nor those that are his instruments. The poor disciples slept, but Judas slept not. The traitors of the church sleep not, the poor disciples they fall asleep, and suffer Christ to manage his own cause. They have a time, and they will be sure to take it. We being therefore not only runners in a race, but born fighters, for every Christian is born so, therefore we must needs strive.

Now the strongest enemy is in our own bosom. Satan is said to depart from Christ for a time, but he never departs from us. We have an enemy,

* That is, 'prize.'—G.

that is, corruption, which hinders us from good, and taints that good we do. We carry corruption in us that seeks to betray us, and will give us no rest at all.

Reason 5. Again, not only thus, but we are all also *stewards*, and we have all of us 'talents,' of which we are to give an account. Now an estate of account ought to be a watchful estate.

We are all subject to give an exact account of that we have done in the flesh. Being therefore to give a strict account, we ought to be watchful.

Reason 6. Again, men *that are under observation* need be watchful. Now there is no Christian but is in perpetual observation, for there is in him a conscience. Though it be asleep for a time, yet that conscience will awake and stare him in the face. You know what is said in Genesis of Cain, 'Sin lieth at the door,' Gen. iv. 7. Conscience, like a sleepy dog, lieth at the door, and will fly in our face when we are going out of this world, and then it will be a heavy time. Thus we are in observation of conscience within us.

We are likewise in observation of Satan, that watches all whatsoever we speak or do.

And then God observes all that we do. All our sins are written with a 'pen of iron,' that they can never be gotten out of the soul without repentance.

If conscience fail, yet God will not fail. Therefore, being under observation, we had need be watchful.

I hope there is none that will deny this, but that they ought to watch.

Now, beloved, since our life is a vigil, a watching time, a warring time, and a race, we are therefore to stand in perpetual watch.

Let us now consider how we may be stirred up to watch. I will not speak all that may be said, but only give you a few things to shew you how we may keep the Lord's watch.

1. And that we may keep it the better, *let us labour to have waking considerations*, that we may preserve our souls, because consideration is a help to watchfulness. Know and believe that there is a God that watches, and an enemy that watches, and [that] conscience will do his office first or last; to know and believe also that there is a day of judgment wherein we must answer all that we have done.

2. Again, *consider the end wherefore we live here*; and let us also consider how suitable our actions are to that end, and whether they be for our good and the salvation of our souls.

3. And then to have a waking consideration *of the presence of God*, as Job had. 'Shall not God see if I do thus and thus?' Job xxxi. 4. And so Joseph, 'How shall I do this great wickedness and sin against God,' Gen. xxxix. 9. The eyes of the Lord goes through the world, seeing the good and bad. He hath an eye that never sleepeth. His eyes see into the dark thoughts of our hearts and sees our inward thoughts. All is naked to his eyes. Now the consideration of this may make us watch over our secret sins. What saith the heathen by the light of nature? What if thou hast nobody to accuse thee? Thou hast a conscience and a God that sees thee.* Think then when thou art in secret, that thou art in the presence of God, who is a judge. Consider of this, that we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. St Paul was kept in a watching condition by the consideration of this: 'Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men;' knowing also that it will be a terrible day, 2 Cor. v. 11. And

* Seneca.—G.

when Solomon would study an argument to startle young men, 'Go to, young man, take thy pleasure; but for all this, remember God will bring thee to judgment,' Eccles. xi. 9.

To this waking consideration add some further considerations.

4. *The fearful condition, to be found in an estate wherein we are not fit to die.*

A man is not in a good condition that is not fit to die. Add this also, that our life is short and uncertain. Now for us to live in an estate that we are not fit to die in is a fearful condition. Let us therefore take heed of promising mirth and jollity to ourselves to-morrow, for that may be the time of God's striking of thee. And that which he hath done to some may be done to thee. Ananias and Sapphira were stricken suddenly. The same may befall thee, and that resolution of thine in vain and sinful courses may be the time that God will take thee.

I might add many more; I only give you a taste of things. In a word,

5. *Labour for such an inward disposition as may dispose us to watchfulness.*

Now, there are two affections, when they are raised, will much help us, to wit, fear and love. See Jacob, when he was afraid of his brother Esau, he spent the night before in prayer and watching. Let us therefore labour to preserve the affection of fear, and in fear, the fear of reverence to offend so gracious a God. And let us watch over our hearts and lives, and labour for the fear of jealousy, because we have hearts subject to betray us. 'Blessed is the man that feareth always,' Prov. xxviii. 14; and 'make an end of your salvation with fear and trembling,' Philip. ii. 12. What fear? The fear of jealousy and reverence; for there is a great use of this fear.

Now if these will not prevail, then fear the day of judgment, and fear hell, if we will fear nothing else.

It is the atheism of these times to stand in awe of nothing; but he who hath a fear of reverence and jealousy is fit for all things. Besides, fear stirs up care, and care stirs up duty; for he that is afraid to offend will be careful to avoid offence and also to please.

So the affection of love; for as the soul is raised to the love of God and Christ, so it will be watchful.

This is a sweet affection, and keeps the soul watchful over anything that may displease the person whom we love.

And then it is full of invention, how he may give content to the person that is loved, and how to keep the soul in the presence of God. We never sin till the soul is drawn away from this, and we never have the soul in a better tune than when we are thus. We need therefore to wind up our affections every day. An instrument, though it be never so well in tune, let it but alone, it will be out; therefore it must be tuned every day. So we should deal with our souls, and when we find our affections to be down, wind them up with waking considerations; and let us do this daily, because they are ready to sink to present things, we are so nusselled* up in them. Those, therefore, that wish well to their souls, had need to wind them up, because they are for another world. And withal, labour to be wise and foresee; that is, to know ourselves both in good and evil, to know what we are naturally prone unto, and wherein we are subject to be overtaken, and then what hath done us good, and wherein we have been overcome. There is no creature will be taken in a snare if he see it. The dull ass, you cannot drive him through the fire. But man, since his fall, though he hath been catched, yet such is the pleasure of sin, that he will fall again thereinto, whereas he should be wiser than a dull beast.

* That is, 'nursed,' 'pampered.'—G.

Add hereunto, to have a soul fit for all advantages of doing good; let us labour for this, whereby we may know how to judge everything in its own worth, that so we may affect* it. Oh that hereby the soul may be raised up, otherwise it will fall. To know God in his greatness, Christ in his goodness, the world in its vanity, and sin in the danger thereof, will be means to stir up the soul to watchfulness. So long as the judgment is in a good frame, so long the soul will be fit for anything. And when we have advantages to anything, let us study how we may turn it to God's glory; and let us redeem those advantages, for this is one exercise of watching, to observe all advantages tending to the glory of God. It will grieve us one day, when we shall see at such a time we lost such an opportunity of doing good, and at such a time neglected such a duty; let us therefore labour to have such a disposition fit for all advantages, considering that this is our seed time. But, alas! how many advantages do we lose in not taking good and doing good!

And let us be wise to see what hinders us from doing good. As, too much business about the things of this world, as if we were born for them, whereas the Scripture limits our care for earthly things, telling us that we 'should use this world as though we used it not,' 1 Cor. vii. 31, but that we may enjoy these things here; but we must use them so as we may be wise unto salvation. Take heed 'of surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this world,' saith Christ, Luke xxi. 34. For when men are plunged in the cares of this world, they have their hearts eaten up, and thereby they lose many advantages of doing good and taking good. We should therefore labour to be in such a disposition that we may take heed of all hindrances. And we ought to do this, because our life is a warfare. We should therefore divide the day, and keep a daily watch.

First in the morning begin to awake with God before the world or the flesh thrust in, and bethink of all that may befall us that day, of all the dangers, of all the troubles; and we should likewise think with what armour we need to encounter with those accidents that may befall us. And then get provision, that whatsoever happens unto us, all may be for our good; and then let us consider how we stand prepared, and where we are like to be surprised strongly, there to prepare. And withal, before we set upon any good thing, let God have the first fruits of our time, and the first fruits of our hearts; let him have the first of the day by prayer, that when at any time we fall into any sin or affliction, we may not have cause to say, we have not commended ourselves unto God, and therefore this evil hath befallen us.

And this will be a comfort to us in all the actions of the day with this resolution. This is my comfort, I have commended myself and my prayers to God, and have set upon the day with this resolution, to do nothing that may offend God or a good conscience, and to regard no iniquity in my heart, but to pass the day under the shadow of the wings of the Almighty. We should labour to be in such a disposition as this; and afterwards in the day let us do nothing wherein we conceive God will not protect us; as in any evil way, for it is a fearful condition to be in any such, God not being in that place.

And then upon occasion be sure we carry a heavenly mind in earthly businesses, whereby we may serve God better, and fear him more; for there is nothing falls† in this life, but a gracious heart may draw out some-

* That is 'choose,' 'love' it.—G.

† That is, 'befalls.'—G.

what of it to make his heart more religious. And to think with ourselves God hath set us in this place, and therefore we do this work.

Many other things may be given, but I name but some. So for recreations, in those whettings be watchful, especially above all things where we are ready to be surprised, as in prosperity. Therefore the Lord commands his people, take heed when thou art in the good land that floweth with milk and honey, that thou forget not the Lord thy God, Deut. iv. 9. Job knew this; therefore when his children were feasting, he offered sacrifice for them, lest they should dishonour God in their hearts, Job i. 5. It was a gracious heart in holy Job so to do. We should in like manner be watchful over ourselves, especially in that we are most prone to be overtaken in; and we should be watchful over ourselves when we are alone, for every man cannot use privacy well. Therefore our sequestration from company we should use in holy meditations. We should be watchful in that, because the devil is busy still. Oh when we are sequestered from others, our thoughts are a fit shop for the devil. Take heed, therefore, of privacy and idleness.

And so for company, by which we may either do good or receive good; for that is a great help to our watch—company—for one strengthens another, as stones in an arch. God hath sanctified the communion of those that are good for the strengthening of others. And therefore the Scripture saith, 'Stir up one another, and exhort one another,' Heb. iii. 13.

If we could account religion a serious thing, as it is, we would not hear these things as strange things, but we would think of them seriously, and practise them affectionately.

And so likewise, when we are to pass the occasions of the day, we should make use of that time we have spent, and go over all that we have done that day again. As God did when he created the world, he viewed all that he had done again. And let us not suffer our bodies to rest till our consciences are assured our sins are forgiven. Oh, it is dangerous to go to bed with a guilty conscience; for what do we know whether we shall see the world again or no? Let us therefore be sure to watch over this, and let us renew our resolution for the time to come. And if we find God's assistance and blessing upon our labours, then let us watch unto prayer, together with praising of our good God, observing all advantages of prayer and praises.

Now when we have observed in some measure that God hath been with us, then it is good to watch that God may have the honour by it.

3. Beloved, if this be so that we must take this course to watch continually, then mark what Christ saith, '*Blessed* is he that is found watching:' so that blessing goes along with watching. And by this blessedness, Christ encourageth us unto watchfulness. Those that keep their souls in a watching frame are blessed. Who saith this? Christ. He speaks and says, 'Blessed are those servants that he shall find watching when he cometh.' They shall be blessed in their life, and blessed at their death especially. Then we should give our souls to watching, because there is a meeting of all when he comes to us in death; for then we give ourselves to him.

Besides, look we to our former course of life, and to the glory that remains for us, and to Christ that is in heaven ready to receive us, and then to commit our souls to him; and to take heed of Satan's temptations, that we despair not thereby; and then to watch, for then Satan must have

all or lose all, and so to end our days. Christ came to some in the first hour of the watch, to some the second, and to some the third hour of the watch; but happy is he that, when Christ shall come, he shall find watching. It is therefore good for young men to watch; but especially when men are in a declining age. It is good for them to watch for Christ's coming, because it cannot be long before he comes to them. Christ may come to the young and middle age, but those that are in the declining part, they should watch especially.

Beloved, Christ is come to us, and we every day go to him, for every day takes away part of our life. We should therefore every day fit ourselves for going to him by death. Our life should be nothing but a fitting ourselves for him; and what is good at the hour of death is good now. We have no security of our life. There is not the worst man but will then wish he had abstained from such and such courses. Do it now.

Beloved, I exhort you to nothing but that which is fit for us, namely, watchfulness; and what is watchfulness but a frame of soul fit to meet Christ. When our faith and hope, and our love about the object, and all the graces of the soul are fit, a man is as he should be.

It is the happiness of a man to be in an estate of well-doing; for what is the estate of heaven? Nothing but so; and to be watchful is the most excellent of all. Therefore as we ought to be watchful at that time, so now.

Now for preparation to the sacrament,* let us consider with whom we are to deal. We are to receive Christ; we are to feast with Christ. Natural wisdom teaches us, when we have to deal with great persons, to labour to have a suitable carriage, not only to speak that which is good, but to do it in all the circumstances exactly and comely. Let us so labour to come as we should do, by preparing our hearts, hungering and thirsting after this blessed means, and to come with hearts kindled with the love of God and Christ, because he gave himself for us; to come with hearts enlarged with thankfulness, and with holy resolutions for the time to come; and look better to our walking in the strength of that receiving. Now forty to one but Satan will set upon us: let us therefore especially watch afterwards; for when the devil knows we have gained any thing in the word and sacraments, by base thoughts, by base company and loose carriages, he seeks to overthrow us; let us therefore not only watch before, but after we have received, that we lose not the fruit. It is not the action that saves us, but the well-doing. 'Let a man therefore examine himself, and so let him eat,' 1 Cor. xi. 28: for as blessed is that servant whom his Master, when he cometh, shall find so doing, so blessed is that receiver whom the Lord shall find holy in preparation, holy in person, and holy in carriage.

* In margin here, 'This was preached before the sacrament, April 27. 1635.' Sibbes died on July 5. following.—G.