

Sabbath School Lesson #11 – Last Day Events – 4-10 June 2016

Christ appealed to the Jews to accept Him, but many were not humbled to accept Him. “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Matthew 23:12). We focus on watchfulness in Matthew 24:42-51.

Replying to the question of the disciples, “What shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the world?” (Matthew 24:3) Jesus mentioned some of the last day events which would mark the progress of the world’s history from that time until His second coming. And then He gave the exhortation to watchfulness which furnishes the basis of our study this week.

In the coming of the Lord is found the consummation of the hope of every believer in Christ. Then will be “the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:21). The promise to Abraham was “that he should be the heir of the world” (Romans 4:13), but “by faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise” (Hebrews 11:9), and God “gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on” (Acts 7:5). “These [Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob] all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declared plainly that they seek a country, ... they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly” (Hebrews 11:13-16). If we are Christ’s, then are we Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29). But our citizenship is in heaven, and we ardently wait for the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20).

Christ’s work for us includes the restoration of all that was lost through sin. Man will be “renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Colossians 3:10); the earth freed from the curse, “For the LORD shall comfort Zion: He will comfort all her waste places; and He shall make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody” (Isaiah 51:3). This work will be completed when Christ returns for us. His promise is: “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:2-3). “Behold, I come quickly; and *My reward is with Me*, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Revelation 22:12).

So it is in the coming of the Lord that the hope of the waiting church has centred during all the centuries. For our living hope, the apostle instructs concerning those who “are fallen asleep in Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:18): “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him ... For the Lord Himself shall descend with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first ... Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). At Christ’s coming the dead are raised, the living changed, and the reward given to His saints that fear His name.

Now the exact time of the Lord’s coming has not been revealed. “But of that day and hour and knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Matthew 24:36). And some seem to regard this as a sufficient reason for not knowing anything about the event, but many prophecies point out when it is near, and after giving a series of signs connected with His second coming, the Saviour said: “Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when his branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that He is near, even at the doors” (verses 32-33). Those who will believe the Word will know of the time. “But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief” (1 Thessalonians 5:4).

The apostle Peter tells us that the “day of the Lord” will come as a thief in the night, “in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10). In Matthew’s account, the Saviour gives us a most impressive admonition. “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. Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” In Luke’s record Christ says, “And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with

surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth" (21:34-35).

Yet no man knows, or can know, the exact time of Christ's coming, or of the advent of the day of the Lord. Our duty is not to locate the day, or month, or year, which will witness the Lord's return; but to "watch" and be "ready," taking heed to the condition of our hearts. The person who attempts to fix upon the exact date of his Lord's return is not obeying the Lord's command to "watch." To watch for a thing is to look for it, without seeing it or knowing just when it is to appear. There is enough for the Christian to be doing in view of the proximity of so great an event, without speculating in regard to times which God has not revealed to us.

We are told what will be the attitude of those who are watching and waiting, in harmony with the instruction and admonitions of Christ. Their hearts will not be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life (Luke 21:34). They will "walk honestly, as in the day" (Romans 13:11-14); they will be "sober," having on "the breastplate of faith and love," and rejoicing in "the hope of salvation" (1 Thessalonians 5:8). They will manifest "all holy conversation and godliness" (2 Peter 3:11). They will be "exhorting one another," and so much the more as they "see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25). By this manner of life they will be watching and ready for their Lord, though knowing not the hour of His return.

Christians "are not in darkness, that that day should overtake [them] as a thief." They are ignorant of the day and the hour, but they are ready for it whenever it may arrive, just as the man who watches is ready for the thief. It is the sleeper who was taken unawares, and suffers a loss. The Christian never sleeps, his spiritual life is ever wakeful and active, for it is the life of God. Many are asleep who know it not. There are multitudes of dreamers in the church as well as in the world. They hear not the voice of the faithful watchmen, crying, "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand" (Romans 13:11-12). Or if they hear the voice, it is with consciousness so dim that they heed it not. The watchman's cry mingles well with the voices of their dreams. The Lord's return is not their theme of final, burning interest.

But watching also includes working. We are not to sit idly by, merely waiting for the time to pass, but "what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, *looking for an hastening* the coming of the day of God." These are they who are diligent in making known that their Lord's coming is near, and knowing the terror of the Lord they persuade men. "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over His household, *to give them meat in due season!* Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when He cometh shall find so doing." It is the duty of the servant to "feed the church of God," by teaching them the Word of God, and he who has been set as a watchman on the walls of Zion should be the first to give warning of any approaching event. What a neglect of duty it is when he is the very one who "shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth His coming!"

But there will be those who will ridicule the idea, and this is in itself one of the signs of the times. "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Peter 3:3-4). It may seem at times as though His coming was being deferred longer than we had hoped, and yet "the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Just now the exhortation to watchfulness should be earnestly heeded. "For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." We are living in the last generation. The last signs are being fulfilled. We now see "upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." What means this war spirit which is now taking such a hold upon men in all parts of the world? What means this arming of the nations? It is simply the preparation for "the battle of that great day of God Almighty."

How soon the storm will burst we know not, but we know that "the day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly." Let he who has light be faithful to his trust by giving light to others. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when He will return from the wedding; that when He cometh and knocketh, they may open unto Him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching ... And if He shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch and find them so, blessed are those servants" (Luke 12:35, 38).