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VOL. IV. FREDERICTON, N. B., SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1887. No. 83.

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164 QUEEN STREET, FREDERICTON.
Fredericton, Oct 6th, 1887

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THE SON OF MAN'S COMING.

Rev. Dr. Kellogg on Christ's Second Event.

Scriptural Assurance that he will come again to the Earth.

The Signs in the Social and Religious World for which Men are Urged to Look.

The following is a sermon preached in St. James' Square Presbyterian Church, Toronto, by Rev. Dr. Kellogg:—

Watch, therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh.—Matthew, xxiv., 42.

On one principal of interpretation we shall be able to agree. It is this: that in all cases the context and subject of discourse are to be allowed decisive force in determining in any passage of Scripture what any word or phrase may mean. The question ever is, not what may, or might, or could this word or phrase be understood to mean, but what, in the light of the context, does this word or phrase mean in this particular place? The principal needs to be borne in mind in approaching the words of our Lord. The question is whether the phrase "the coming of the Son of Man" may conceivably be applied to death or the destruction of Jerusalem, or any spiritual or providential intervention of the Lord, but how does the context require us to understand this phrase in this particular connection?

Grant, if you like, that there are many different "comings" of the son of man; we want to know what is that particular "coming" of which the Lord speaks in this place, and for which He commands His disciples to watch. Till we know that, we cannot obey Him.

Evidently it must be that coming of which the disciples had asked Him, saying, "Master, what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the age?" The text is a part of the answer to this question, and the "coming" in the answer must be the coming referred to in the question. This settles it, you must see, once for all, that the words cannot have the slightest reference to death. They are often so applied; but without the smallest warrant from the context. For when the disciples asked the Master, "What shall be the sign of thy coming," did they mean to ask what were the signs of a man's dying? The question answers itself. I repeat it then: that to apply this text to death, as is often done, is to use it in a sense for which there is not the least justification in the Olivet discourse; and is to substitute for a command actually given by our Saviour, another quite different command which he never gave at all.

Is then the coming of which He speaks the destruction of Jerusalem? So many have imagined, but neither will this opinion stand a careful examination of the context. It is indeed true that the Lord did speak in this discourse, and very fully, of a coming destruction of Jerusalem, and of a great tribulation upon Israel which should then begin, and continue—as we learn from Luke's account of the same discourse—in

THE SCATTERING OF THE JEWS

among all nations, and the treading down of Jerusalem by the Gentiles till the times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled (cf. Luke xxi.., 24). But it is none the less impossible to understand the coming of the Son of Man of which He then speaks—Matth., xxiv., 30, Luke xxi., 27—and to which He refers in the injunction of the text, of that destruction of the Holy City. Do you ask me why? I answer, for the simple reason that according to all the evangelists Jesus expressly said that this "coming" should be "after" the Jewish tribulation. For I take it to be self-evident that when, of two events named, one is said to take place after the other, they cannot be one and the same event. The "coming" of the Son of Man in the clouds of Heaven," of which we read in verse 30, cannot therefore be the destruction of Jerusalem; and so when, in the text, with reference to that coming He charges us to "watch," because we know not when it shall be, we are forbidden to apply it to that event. We may go further and say with the utmost confidence that the coming spoken of in the text cannot refer to anything that has taken place from that day to this. For the evangelist Luke, xxi., 23, 24, describes the predicted "tribulation" as continuing in the scattering of the Jews among all nations, and the subjection for a long time of Jerusalem to Gentile power. No one needs to be told that, as a matter fact, that tribulation on the Jews is in force to-day. It is evidently lightening, but it is not yet quite ended. It is plain, then, that the coming which was to take place "after that tribulation" is still in the future. Hence when our Lord says, "Watch, for ye know not the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh." He added these words to His disciples who first received the command:—"And what I say unto you I say unto *all*, Watch!"

Let no one of you imagine that in this the teacher is propounding some theological fancy peculiar to himself. On the contrary, without fear of contradiction, I affirm this to be the professed though much-neglected faith of Christendom. So plain is the Saviour's teaching as to His second advent, and so manifest the duty which is laid upon us in the text, that our own Confession of Faith in chap. xxxiii. has devoted a whole section to it, in which we have these words:—

"As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment * * * so will He have that day unknown to men, that they may be always watchful, because they know not what hour their Lord will come."

The meaning of these words in the Confession, which we as Presbyterians profess to receive as a true exhibit of the teaching of Holy Scripture, has been put with admirable clearness by the late Rev. Prof. A. A. Hodge, D. D., of Princeton, N. J, in his "Commentary on the Westminster Confession," where he says:

"This section teaches * * * that the designed effect of the attitude of uncertainty with regard to the time of the second advent * * * in which the saints are placed, is that they should regard it as always immediately impending."

It is then for the future second, glorious personal coming of Jesus Christ that the text commands us to watch. We may take that as certain. In further exposition and application of the words, I shall endeavor to show you, first, what is included in the idea of watching, and secondly, what are some of the leading motives by which our Lord has enforced the command.

I. First then, what is it to "watch" for the second coming of the Lord? I answer, that watching always includes three things, namely, Expectation, Vigilance and Preparation. All three are essential; leave out any one of these, and a man is not obeying the command of the text.

1. The first element in watching is expectancy. If you tell me that you are watching for the return of one of your household from a journey, I infer that you are expecting their return from that journey. He is absent now, but it is plain that you do not expect him to be absent always. You expect him to return. So also, to watch for the the Lord Jesus from Heaven, is to expect the Lord Jesus from Heaven. He is absent now; but we do not expect him to be absent always. We look for His return. This, accordingly, is said to have been the attitude of the primitive believers. Thus Paul describes himself and the Philippian believers, as men whose citizenship was in Heaven, "from whence also

WE LOOK FOR THE SAVIOUR,

the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change the bodies of our humiliation into the likeness of His own body of glory."

So in I. Thess., i, 9.10, we are told that the heathen neighbors of the Thessalonian Christians described them as having two peculiarities; they had "turned to God from idols," and they were "waiting for the Son of God from Heaven, even Jesus." This their expectation that that crucified Jew, Jesus the Nazarene, would come in glory in the clouds of Heaven, was such a prominent thing with them that it attracted universal attention. Let me ask you in passing whether you think that an intelligent heathen coming to Toronto or any other city in Christendom, if asked to describe Christians in general, by the two particulars which most attracted his attention, would be likely to mention as one of these, that they were a people differing from others in this, that they were all looking for the Lord Jesus from heaven? Or might he not attend many a church for a long time and mingle with many professed believers for years, and never once hear the subject mentioned.

Thus Prof. Fisher, of Yale College (not a premillenarian), in his account of primitive faith and doctrine, says of the Apostles:—

"Their yearning for their absent Lord mingled itself with the conviction that the Saviour's work would be incomplete until there should be a stupendous manifestation of His power in connection with it. Every hour's delay in His coming was a painful postponement of a wish that pined for its fulfilment.....This expectation is expressed by all the Apostles in terms which admit of no other interpretation. To put any other construction on these passages, as if the coming to which they refer were anything else than the Second Advent, would be to introduce a dangerous license in interpretation, and one which might be employed to subvert the principal doctrines of the Christian system. The same expectation is expressed in most of the Fathers of the second century."

To the same effect is the testimony of Gibbon and all the historians of the primitive Church. The believers of that time were eminently a people who were distinguished from all others by their avowed and earnest expectation of the Lord Jesus from Heaven. That was the way in which they understood the Saviour's command as given in the text. In this

WE ARE CALLED TO IMITATE THEM.

2. But although expectation is essential to watching, yet, if that be all, there is no watching. It is evident that I may be expecting a friend, and yet not be watching for that friend. If for example, my friend has gone to Europe and has told me that he will return, but not under a year, I shall certainly expect his return, but till that time is up I shall not watch for him. Evidently, watching is more than mere expectation. It includes also vigilance. By vigilance is meant, a careful looking for and scrutiny of what signs there may be of the near approach of him for whom I watch. The sentinel of outpost duty watches, not merely by a general expectation of the approach of the enemy, but by a careful looking for and scrutiny of whatever sign he may see or hear, or think he sees or hears, of the enemy's approach. You watch for the coming of your absent friend, by listening intently for every footfall on the pavement, every sound of voices on the street, which may betoken the near approach of his face. Hence it is plain that vigilance implies a belief not only that the person for whom we watch will come some time, but that he may come soon. Do not forget this. There may thus be no expectation without vigilance; but there can be no watching without vigilance. The virgins in the parable were all of them, wise and foolish, expecting the bridegroom; else they had not been in the marriage procession; but they failed none the less in watching. Thrown off their guard by the bridegroom's unexpected delay, they all, wise and foolish, fell asleep, and thus while they had ceased to expect that he would come some time, they ceased to be vigilant, and therefore ceased to watch. It is plain, if this be so, that if we will obey the command of our Lord to watch for his second coming, we must not assume to fix in our minds.

THE TIME OF HIS ADVENT.

This is very often done. It is done in two ways. There are those who fix a time in the near future; there are others who fix a time in the distant future. Some say the Lord will come in 1888, or 1897, or some other near date. Others says that it is certain that the Lord cannot come in our day at all; that, in fact, it may be assumed as certain that he will not come for centuries. But these are just as much in the wrong as the others, and like them are acting in direct contravention of our Lord's plain words, that not even the angels of God know the time of his coming. If not they, how much less do we? If the angels do not know, are the commentators and theologians wiser than they? It is just in this way that multitudes of Christian people put themselves in a mental position in which it has become impossible for them to obey this command of our Lord to watch.

In opposition to all such theories, whether they fix the time of the advent either in the near or the distant future, stand unaltered our Saviour's very solemn words, "Ye know not when the Master of the house cometh; at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning. What I say unto you, I say unto all, watch!"

As therefore this command to watch for the Lord's Second Advent requires us to be vigilant for Him as well as to expect Him, it is plain that it requires us to regard His advent as a continual possibility? Some of you may perhaps be saying that you cannot do this because of many things which you think must take place before the Lord can come. In other words, you have a theory of prophetic interpretation, more or less definite, and according to that theory the Lord cannot come in our day. The answer to this very common objection is very simple, namely, duty first, theory afterward. The Lord has not commanded you to have a theory of prophetic interpretation, but He has commanded you to watch for His appearing, on the express ground that you do not know but that He may come "in the first watch." It is a good thing to have a theory, if a true one; but it is better yet and safer to obey the Lord. And if we find that anything in our understanding of Scripture hinders us from maintaining the attitude of expectant vigilance toward the Lord's coming which is here enjoined, it will at least be prudent to inquire whether we may or may not be misunderstanding the Scripture. These words then make it our duty, believing that the Lord may very possibly come in our generation, to be ever looking out for any signs that may

BETOKEN HIS NEAR APPROACH.

That there will be such signs, the Lord has plainly told us. He said that when we should see certain things coming to pass, we might "know that He was near, even at the doors." (See vs 33 and parellels.) And, it may be added, he also taught, that although this was true, yet the most of men would never notice the signs, or else would misinterpret them; for he said that the day would come "as a snare on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth." (Luke xxi 35.) But he said there would be signs for him who would heed them. Among these he named, for example, the universal preaching of the Gospel. He said, in so many words, when this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be "preached in all the world for a witness among all nations, then shall the end be,"—"the end of the age," concerning the sign of which His disciples had asked Him. He described also the social condition of that period as a time when there should be "on earth distress of nations with perplexity; men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth."

But in reply to this we are often pointed to the disappointment of christians in this matter. Men, we are told, have often thought that they discerned the signs, and have thought the Lord was near, and yet He has not come. And with this multitudes think that they have sufficiently excused themselves from obeying the Lord's command. But should we think of reasoning like this in earthly affairs? What, for instance, would you think of the sentinel who, on perilous picket duty, because he could not tell with certainty when the rustling of the leaf or the distant tramp of horsemen betokened the enemy's approach, because he had often misinterpreted such facts and been alarmed for nothing, should therefore excuse himself from any further attention to such things and suffer all such signs to go unheeded? Would you like to feel that your life was in the hands of such a soldier?

Or what, at sea, would you think if, with the angry clouds gathering around, the sea and the waves roaring, the commander should refuse even to pay any attention to these things, on the ground that often he had misinterpreted such signs and though a storm coming when it was not? Would you like to be at sea with a commander of that kind? And shall we act more wisely, is our conduct more excusable, if being warned that

JESUS CHRIST IS CERTAINLY RETURNING,

that His coming will be as the lightning in its suddenness, bringing glory to the ready, judgment to the unready, charged too by Himself to keep a vigilant outlook for Him; yet, because we are not made infallible, take no heed to signs which may be heralding His approach—signs which, He has told us, shall as surely go before His coming as the cloud before the storm, the dawn before the sunrise? Shall we act on this wise? God forbid! Enough let it be for us that our Lord has bidden us be vigilant; He knows better far than we wherein our wisdom lies! Let it not be that any of us for our unwatchfulness should have to hear from Christ at last that sad reproof to some of old: "How was it that ye did not discern the signs of the times?"

3. But while expectation and vigilance are essential elements in that watching which the text enjoins, they are not the whole of it. It is implied also that we shall keep ourselves in readiness for Christ's appearing. The betrothed maiden who expects day by day her affianced one to claim her as his bride, does not satisfy herself with mere expectation or with listening for His coming. She keeps herself in readiness to give him a suitable welcome. So with the coming of the heavenly bridegroom.

A watching believer will be a ready believer. Thus it is quite possible that one may be expecting the Lord's coming, and be a great student of prophecy and of the signs of the times and yet not be obeying this command.

With all his expectation of the Bridegroom and his concern to be found in the company of those who go out to meet Him, a man may very possibly forget to take oil in his vessel with his lamp. Let us remember this. I need not remind you in what this readiness for Christ's coming consists. It begins with faith and repentance; it is expressed in holiness and unworldliness of life, a life such as shall bear a continuous witness in the world that we do really believe in Christ's atoning death, His glorious resurrection and imminent appearing as earth's rightful King. Faith, repentance, holy living—herein is the only preparation. Let us not deceive ourselves. No half preparation is consistent with the attitude of a soul watching for the Saviour's coming. It will not be found enough to be in the virgin company, to be enrolled as church members in good and regular standing. Remember that half of that virgin company in the parable were

SHUT OUT FROM THE MARRIAGE SUPPER.

Nay, we may say more. As has been truely remarked, "Even the best prepared were not quite ready." For observe, it is said, that, suddenly awakened by the cry that the bridegroom was at hand, "all those virgins," not the foolish only, but the wise as well, "arose and trimmed their lamps." From this it appears that the lamps of even the wise, because they had neglected to watch, had begun to burn dimly and needed trimming. Thus there may be a sincere profession where there is not yet full readiness to meet Christ.

II. In closing I will now advert briefly to the motives by which Our Lord has enforced this so neglected command.

1. Of these the first and most frequently insisted on is that which is mentioned in the text, the uncertainty of the time. Ye know not the day or the hour when the son of man cometh." These words have never yet been taken back. They stand, for all believers in all ages, a most impressive and solemn warning to continued watchfulness—not for death, as we have clearly seen, but for that second coming of the Lord which, for all His believing people, shall

END DEATH IN RESURRECTION.

When it shall be we know not. It may be in the first watch, for the Saviour has said so; it may not be till later. The Church may have long years of weary waiting yet before her, or her redemption may be just at hand. So far from its being certain that Christ will not come for centuries, it is quite possible, according to the Scriptures, that, for anything any man really knows to the contrary, many of us may live to witness, without dying, the glorious appearing!

What a motive this for watchfulness! for liveliest expectation, for the most wakeful vigilance, for the most thorough preparation! How can we be excused if we neglect it!

2. Another motive to watchfulness which our Lord has given us is found in His warning that when at last he does come, that coming will be to the most of men a great surprise. It will be a surprise, not only to avowed worldlings and unbelievers, but, He tells us, also to the Church. All the parables and illustrations which He uses regarding His coming set this forth. It was while the servant was saying, "My Lord delayeth His coming!" that the master of the house came. It was while "all the virgins," wise, mark, as well as foolish, were soundly sleeping, that the startling cry was heard "Behold the bridegroom cometh! Go ye out to meet him!" It is while men shall be saying, 'Peace and safety," Paul declares, that sudden destruction shall come upon them, and they shall not escape. The day of the coming of the Son of Man shall be, Christ said, "as the days of Noah." Noah had been preaching for several hundred years, and for a hundred and twenty years had been telling of the coming flood. But they did not believe him; they probably thought the old man fanatical or daft. They went on with their worldly living just the same, "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, and knew not till the flood came and swept them all away." "So," adds the Saviour, "shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed."

Hence it appears that one of the most common reasons given by Christians for declining to pay attention to this truth and duty, namely, that the most of people do not believe in it, and understand the Scriptures differently, ought to be, motive to just the opposite conclusion. For this is the fact we may see before our eyes, that even in the church, people have come to think and talk and live just as our Saviour said they would be thinking and living when He should come. In the first days of the Church when the virgin company

HAD NOT YET COME TO SLEEP,

and the expectation of the advent was quick and lively, this prediction must have seemed very hard to believe. But we see it fulfilled! What an argument this should be for increased watchfulness! for seeking to be in this respect as much unlike the most of professing Christains as possible!

3 It is another motive to obedience to this command, which our Lord and His apostles have set before us, that it will prove to many a very evil and disastrous thing not to be found watching for the Lord. The absence of this spirit is always represented as one of the dark features in the condition of the Church as she nears the time of the advent. It is against this particular form of spiritual declension, as one to which even true Christians, even "wise virgins," by reason of the Lord's delay, would be peculiarly exposed, and which ever tends to bring in its train all manner of easy going religion and absorbing worldiness, that the most solemn and repeated warnings of the Lord are given.

Look about you! Are there no significant signs which should waken every one of us to a trimming of lamps and closest vigilance? The Gospel "shall be preached for a witness among all nations; then shall the end come!" Have those words no special note of warning in this missionary century? The Church was to be unexpectant; men should be looking forward to years of peace and safety. How is it with that sign? Can we discern it? True, the cry of warning is heard, and ever more and more. A McCheyne, the Bonars, a Spurgeon, an Alford, a Godet, a great number of learned and devout men on the continent of Europe, and a Moody and a great company of evangelists with him, are raising anew the cry, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh!" Is there nothing in all this to set us to thinking?

Verily we, in this generation, may say, with a greater emphasis than ever be-