

## Preparation For Christ's Coming\*

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Christ followed His prophesy of His second coming and the coincident end of the world with directions as to the preparation needed for these events.

## WATCHFULNESS ENJOINED.

Not less than six times in close connection does our Lord give His command to watch and He enforces His command by a historical illustration from the times of Noah and by four parables,—that of the thief in the night, that of the householder departing for a season and leaving his servants in charge, that of the ten virgins and that of the talents. The historic incident and the four parables is each a fresh blow to drive into the minds of careless disciples a truth of the utmost importance.

Christ's argument for watchfulness consist of two considerations. The first is that His coming will be sudden and unexpected. No man can tell when Christ will come and that coming will evidently take men by surprise. People will be busy at their ordinary tasks when suddenly some of their number will disappear. The second consideration is that of the effects of such uncertainty on the mind. It is a peculiarity of human nature that we are tempted to slight an event which is uncertain. This was the case in the days of Noah, when the coming of the flood was foretold, but no man knew the day of its coming. This is the case whether the event is expected to take place immediately as in this parable of the ten virgins, or in an indefinite future, as in the parable of the unfaithful servants of the absent householder.

We see here our duty in regard to the unexpected throughout life,—it is to be always on the watch for it. Christ's coming and the approach of the flood are alike in this, that they are sudden and unexpected. The same quality pertains to death and to a variety of events that may meet us at any turn through life. Because men do not know when they must die, they are strangely unconcerned regarding it. But their duty regarding it is plain,—they must be watchful and ready for its coming. So of the thousand emergencies that may any hour spring upon us at the next bend of the road; we must be in as much readiness as possible for them all. There are certainly before us times of great trial, of weighty responsibility, of important decisions. They will come unexpectedly. We must not be caught by them unawares.

## WATCHFULNESS DEFINED.

There is a danger that we think watchfulness consists in trying to find out the hour of Christ's coming. Christ, therefore, impresses on us the truth that a far greater duty is to watch ourselves. What is most needed and what watchfulness most implies is our own readiness for the unexpected coming. What we must have is a fit preparation. We are liable to grow cold and careless, to be absorbed with the world, turning our mind to the necessities and pleasures of life, as was done in the days of Noah, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. Prayer is an antidote to such worldliness and an indispensable help in securing readiness for the dread events of the future, delayed in coming and uncertain as to the time of their coming. To secure a readiness for such events Christ enjoins three duties, setting them forth in as many parables.

The first duty is *faithfulness*. The Master is absent from His house and when He will return we know not. In the meantime we His servants, have our appointed tasks. We must meet them faithfully, taking no advantage of His absence, as mere eye-servants, but always anxious to do our whole duty. This obligation increases with our responsibility. Ministers of the Gospel, standing as the teachers of others, and all in similar high trusts, are held to a peculiar watchfulness. Their lack of faithfulness brings to others, and consequently to themselves, peculiar woe.

A second duty is *spirituality*. In the parable of the ten virgins the five foolish had no oil in their lamps when the bridegroom came. They had neglected to keep their lamps replenished. In the Scriptures, oil serves as a symbol of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We need the divine anointing. We need as Zechariah, in his vision of the olive trees puts it, an oil that shall continually drop as an unfailing supply from the olive trees themselves. Those nominal Christians that are content with being once converted to Christ and who take no measures to supply

themselves with divine grace for daily needs will find themselves when Christ comes, or any other solemn emergency of life arrives, altogether unprepared. The opportunity for joy and greatness will arrive, they will be unable to enter and the door will close against them. Here is a universal law. No friendship, even the tenderest that can exist, that between husband and wife can exist merely on past manifestations of love. There must be daily renewals, new acts and feelings of tenderness, else in time the old feeling dies out and sweetness of the past is beyond recall. How sad it is when friends thus presume on each other and fail to watch over the love that is each other's life and to keep it freshly burning.

The third duty is *growth*. God gives us talents differing accordingly to our personality, but all are to be improved. We are not ready for Christ's coming unless we put those talents to use and develop them in His service. We must make more of ourselves for Christ's sake and let our love for Him be a stimulus to greatness and efficiency.

## About Nagging.

Correction is a noble beast, but nagging is the meanest mare in the stable. This one is transformed into the other by the potent poison of selfishness. Nagging is admonition soured. Nagging is correction run to seed. Admonition is progressive, nagging is stationary. Admonition is sympathetic, nagging is egotistic. Admonition teaches, nagging judges. Admonition graciously leads, nagging spitefully pushes. Admonition is a sagacious St. Bernard, nagging is a snapping poodle. Admonition produces reformation, nagging produces only exasperation.

There is a righteous indignation, which is a teacher of righteousness; but nagging is born of unrighteous indignation. Its hidden source is offended self-esteem. It is often our duty to find fault, but it is more often our duty to stop finding fault. To cease speaking is as great an art as the art of speech. Better corrections many times too few than once too often. "Let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay," applies to fault-finding as well as to expletives. Here, as elsewhere, we are not heard for our much speaking. True, "constant dropping wears away the stone," but in the matter of hearts, on the contrary, constant dropping petrifies them. "Precept upon precept, line upon line"—but not the same precept, nor the same line, nor in the same place.

The best workman uses the fewest blows. If we are seeking our dear one's amendment rather than our own glory, we shall be anxious that as much of the amendment as possible shall come from him. Nagging fails largely because it does not give the culprit a chance to improve of his own motion. See how carefully God has preserved the free agency of mankind, refraining from forcing upon us either good or evil; and shall we not be as wise in dealing with each other? If you want a man to do the right, point it out, and leave him alone long enough for him to make willing choice of the right, and label his deed with his own name.

In fact, fault-finding always finds failure if it considers the fault rather than the man. We speak, and then look for results, for amendment, instead of looking for the will to amend. This proves the shallowness of our own desire, that it regards exteriors, and is not prompted by the Spirit, since it does not look to the spiritual for its success. Our correction will produce righteousness only when it produces love for righteousness; and if it seeks first to inspire this love, everything else will be added to it.

And not only will love be the object sought by admonition; it will also be the tool that is used. Diamonds are cut only by diamonds, and hearts are formed to beauty only by loving hearts. "Liking cures;" that is the law of spiritual homeopathy. Admonition, like charity, endures all things, because it hopes all things; nagging endures nothing, because it hopes nothing and has no love. The first requisite of a good corrector is that he be a good lover. If you want to find fault, first find hearts. Words do not reach your brother's will except along the telegraph wires of heart strings. If he won't do it for your heart, he won't do it for your tongue.

\*An Exposition based on (Matt. xxiv. 37—xxv. 30); in the Bible Study Union Course on "The Teachings of Christ."