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BIBLE LESSONS.

STUDIES IN MARK.

Second Quarter.

Lesson V. May 5. Mark 13: 24-37.

THE COMMAND TO WATCH.

GOLDEN TEXT.

EXPLANATORY.

I. THE COMING AGAIN OF THE LORD. 24. But in those days after that tribulation: of which he had been speaking in verse 14; that is, after the tribulation connected with the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dissolution of the Jewish state and dispensation. The sun shall be darkened. That this and the following expressions do not refer to physical signs, but are illustrative and typical, is plain from Acts 2: 16, 20, where St. Peter applied the same expressions to his time, when no such literal physical signs appeared. Similar figurative, poetical representations of great civil and social commotions are depicted in Isa. 34: 10; 24: 23; 34: 4; Ezek. 32: 7, 8; Joel 2: 10; 3: 15; Amos 8: 9; Mic. 3: 6, 8.

25. And the stars of heaven shall fall. Such predictions were never intended for literal fulfillment, for the simple reason that they are incapable of it. The leaders, the kings and princes that shine like stars, the wealth that exalts itself in glory, the tyrannies, hierarchies, idolatries, slaveries, systems of false religion and philosophy—all these stars must fall before the kingdom of Christ can shine resplendent in its glory. And the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. The forces which dwell in the heavens and keep them stable.

26. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds. (1) Doubtless at least a literal coming thus, as foretold in Acts 1: 9, 11. A personal coming, but not with corporeal body, like the one he had on earth, for he has not that body in heaven. (2) At the destruction of Jerusalem his coming was in the clouds, as expressing that the sources of the kingdom and the powers that guided and gave it success, were from heaven and not from earth—that it was a spiritual kingdom, and not a temporal kingdom. With great power and glory. True of each part of His coming—doubly true of the great last coming.

27. And then shall He send His angels. The angels may include (1) the holy angels who are ministering spirits (Heb. 1: 14), and have special care over Christ's little ones (Matt. 18: 10). (2) ministers are "the angels of the churches" (Rev. 1: 4). (3) all God's messengers and influences (Ps. 104: 4; Heb. 1: 7). And shall gather together His elect. His chosen ones in whom His soul delights; his people, the members of his kingdom. From the four winds. Used to denote the quarters of the earth's surface; i. e., from all parts of the earth. The uttermost part of the uttermost part of heaven. Probably an allusion to the apparent junction of earth and sky at the visible horizon, but in any case it refers to the whole world.

28. Now learn a parable of the fig tree. More literally, Learn ye the parable of the fig tree. Our Lord spoke this upon the Mount of Olives, where fig-trees were growing all around him; and the trees were doubtless beginning to verify the words by opening signs of the season. 29. So ye, in like manner, etc. What our Lord teaches is that as surely as the fresh green foliage of the fig tree is a sign of summer, so shall the signs of which he speaks portend the coming of the Son of man. Seen at the doors. As if Christ stood by the door, ready to enter, the moment the doors are opened. They needed this warning so that they might escape when the great destruction of Jerusalem came, as we need it to lead us to escape from the judgments to come.

30. Verily I say unto you. These words are intended to impress the importance and certainty of what follows. This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be done: accomplished. There are two explanations: (1) Generation is taken in its ordinary sense of the persons then living. That the word here has this meaning is plain from the previous statement of Christ (Mark 13: 30). "There be some here, which shall in no wise taste death till they see the kingdom of God come with power." And the prophecy had one exact fulfillment within that generation. (2) "The world translated generation has sometimes the meaning of race or nation; leaving it, there, a more pregnant meaning, implying that the character of one generation stamps itself upon the race, as here in this verse also." That is, here the prophecy is not merely that the Jewish nation, as a nation, should not pass away, but also that it should not lose its national character; that it should not undergo changes of time it should remain unchanged; and this prophecy has been wonderfully fulfilled in the unparalleled history of the Jews.

31. Heaven and earth shall pass away. The most solid and substantial of material things. But my words shall not pass away. They shall be fulfilled to the letter. "Never did the speaker seem to stand more utterly alone than when he uttered this majestic utterance. Never did it seem more improbable that it should be fulfilled. FULFILLMENTS (1) All the things were fulfilled in the first era of Christ's coming (see last lesson, which began on the day of Pentecost and ended with the destruction of Jerusalem. The kingdom was then established. The living, personal Christ was in the church, guiding and ruling it. (2) It will be more completely fulfilled in the full coming of the kingdom of God on the earth. There is a growing unity of the church. Christ is becoming more and more visibly present. (3) The fulfillment at the day of judgment is the unknown future, but is the certain completion of the kingdom of God on earth.

III. THE EXACT TIME UNKNOWN.—Ver. 32. But of that day and that hour: when Christ should come in his kingdom. Knoweth no man. The exact time is uncertain. They could not see the signs of the coming was near; but they could not know just when it would take place. Neither the Son, but the Father. The Son in his voluntary assumption

tion of human nature, with his human mind, in a human body, did not know the exact time of the advent.

Note. His voluntary not knowing the day of judgment, during the days of his flesh, is a wonderful, chronological curiosity and mathematical calculation in the exposition of Scripture prophecy. It is not likely that any theologian, however learned, should know more or ought to know more on this point than Christ himself—who will judge the quick and the dead—chooses to know in the state of his humiliation.

IV. THE DUTY OF WATCHING.—Ver. 33. First Duty, Take ye heed. In the original the word means keep your eyes open; look around on every side; examine and understand. Second Duty, Watch. Watch, both in the Greek and in the English, is closely allied to wake. It expresses not a mere act, but a state of wakefulness and watching.

How to Watch.—Unless we work we shall not keep spiritually awake and lively; unless we are awake we shall not work. AGAINST WHAT TO WATCH. The moral dangers and temptations which grow out of the times. So we are to watch against temptations from within and without; against prevailing iniquities which fill the air with moral malice, or chill the piety of even the church; against failure in duty; against loss of the warmth of first love; against the day of death and of judgment, so as to be prepared for them when they come.

THIRD DUTY, Pray. Watching alone is not enough; for the dangers against which we watch may be too strong for us. We need the protection of a higher power. REASONS FOR WATCHFULNESS AND PRAYER. For ye know not when the time is. Therefore it will not do to be at any time off our guard. Therefore we must be always prepared, always doing our duty, always ready for the future. The time of our death is uncertain; the time of temptation is uncertain; the time when God will call us to account is uncertain; the time when Christ will come and opportunity is past is uncertain.

V. THE DUTY OF WATCHING ILLUSTRATED. 34. For the son of man. Better, it is as when a man. The whole matter of watching is in the following parable. Taking a far journey. It is as if Christ were far away, and permitting us to go on with our work as if for an absent Lord; for Jesus is unseen. Who left his house: the church, the disciples. Give ye authority. i. e., the delegated power to conduct his household, and to manage his affairs while absent. To every man his work. The authority being joined with duty. Commanded the porter (or doorkeeper) to watch. After he had given all the orders concerning the internal affairs, he gives finally, at the door, to the porter, the additional command to watch; this is the point of the parable. He should keep awake and guard the house, as well as be in readiness to readmit his Master, should he unexpectedly return.

35. Watch ye therefore. "It is the fundamental law of watchfulness, to be always watching." Ye know not when the master of the house cometh. But with all the obscurity thus intentionally thrown around the day and the hour of Christ's coming, let us not forget that no obscurest thing hangs around the great event itself. At even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrow, or in the morning. These were the four regular watches of the night. They represent the various eras or crises in the world's history, and the different ages of man. No one can know at what period of his life the Lord will come to him.

36. Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping: i. e., unprepared. The comings of the Lord are ever unexpected to us.—His coming at death, His coming to judge the world, His coming in the crises of our lives. His coming at opportunities and open doors. His coming with the power of the Holy Spirit. 37. And what I say unto you (the disciples) I say unto all (to every disciple, great or small, living then, or who shall ever live). Beware. St. Matthew tells us how the Lord came to impart these lessons of watchfulness and faithfulness still more deeply by the parables of the "Ten Virgins" (Matt. 25: 1, 13), and the "Talents" (Matt. 25: 14, 30), and closed all with a picture of the awful day when the Son of man would separate all nations one from another as the shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats (Matt. 25: 31, 46). So ended the great discourse on the Mount of Olives; and the Sunday set, and the Wednesday of Holy Week had already begun before the time of the company entered the hamlet of Bethany.

A Mother's Experiment. The friend of a young mother was talking with her about her maternal responsibilities, and urged the duty of constant and believing prayer for the early conversion of her children. She assured him, that she could not spare time to carry her little ones to the throne of grace, yet complained of a want of faith and definiteness in asking for them the special influence of the Holy Spirit.

"Do you pray for each child separately and by name?" inquired the friend. "No, that has never been my habit," was the reply. "I think it is of much importance, Mrs. H., especially as a help to our faith, and to the clearness and intensity of our desires on their behalf. You pray with them, I trust, as well as for them?"

"Sometimes I do, but not often. They seem a little restless and inclined to whisper together when my eyes are closed, and so I have felt less embarrassment and more freedom in supplication by being alone at such seasons." "Let us persuade you to take Mrs. H. to try a different plan. Take your little son and daughter each separately to the place of prayer, and kneeling with them before the Lord, tell him the name, the history, the special want of each, and see if your heart is not opened to plead for them as you persuade her to take Mrs. H. Tears were in the eyes of the young mother as she said, with trembling lips, "I'll try."

"As evening came on, she had not forgotten her promise; but as she saw that Sarah, her daughter, was unusually peevish, she thought best to take her to her son first to the chamber. Willie was a bright and pleasant boy of five years, and when his mother whispered her wish to pray with him, he gladly put his hand in

hers and knelt by her side. As he heard his name mentioned before the Lord, a tender hush fell upon his young spirit, and he clasped his fingers more tightly as each petition for his special need was breathed into the ear of his Father in heaven. And did not the clinging of that little hand warm her heart to new and more fervent desire, as she poured forth her supplication to the Healer and Answerer of prayer?

When the mother and child arose from their knees, Willie's face was like a rainbow smiling through tears. "Mamma, mamma," said he, "I am so glad you told Jesus my name. Now he'll know me when I get to heaven; and when the kind angels that carry little children to the Saviour take me and lay me in His arms, Jesus will look at me so pleasant and say: 'Why, this is Willie H. His mother told me about him. How happy I am to see you, Willie!' Won't that be nice, mamma?" — Watchman.

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