

"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me."

- Ezekiel iii,17

II Samuel xviii,19-end

John viii,12-32

Psalm 130

New Book of Worship, Psalm 130, p.84

The watchman is a picturesque figure in Old Testament history. We recall the picture of the watchman posted upon the roof in a city beyond Jordan, where David awaited news of the battle with his rebellious son Absalom, announcing to King David one runner, and then another who came with tidings. And there is the watchman on the tower of Jezreel who gave warning of the approach of Jehu, driving furiously in his chariot up the valley from the Jordan.

It was the duty of the watchman to see in the distance an approaching enemy and to give warning of the danger. And if he saw the danger and failed to give the alarm, we are told by the prophet Ezekiel that he would be held accountable for the harm that fell upon the people.

Another duty of the watchman was to watch for the breaking of the dawn. A vivid picture is given us of the watchman in Jerusalem, standing on the high pinnacle of the temple watching for the first beams of the morning sun to appear above the Mount of Olives. Then with the threefold blast of the silver trumpets the signal was given to proceed with the morning sacrifice, and the city awakened to its busy life. This watching for the day is suggested in the passage from Isaiah: "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night," and in the familiar Psalm: "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning."

The power which really distinguishes man from the beasts is the power to lift his thoughts above and beyond the physical world around him. As the striking allegory of Genesis puts it, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Man, differently from the beasts, had from his first creation spiritual as well as physical potentialities. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made." Man's spiritual nature is not developed by getting for himself all that he can of this world's goods and pleasures. The heavens of the soul are formed by the Word of God. To keep its precepts is life eternal. It is the Book of Life, and in it we find revealed the way of life.

These pictures of the watchman guarding the city or looking for the sunrise suggest to us instinctively another kind of watching. The chapter of Ezekiel from which our text is taken speaks of the posting of the watchman and of his duty to give warning, and then turns abruptly to the office of priest and prophet. "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me."

This text tells us of a power given to us by the Lord, a power which it is our duty to exercise. The watchman took his position on some vantage point, such as a tower or wall. This pictures our power to rise to a spiritual point of view, where we can see life in the light of the Lord's truth. It is only from this vantage point that we can see the dangers that threaten and be prepared to resist them, and from

there only can we read and interpret truly the signs of the times.

Especially should we look to see the Lord's purposes. The power of the watchman represents that power which is given when we read the Word, learn about the Lord, about what He has done for mankind, and what in these days He is doing to make His power felt and to establish His Kingdom.

We may all be spiritual watchmen, since the Lord has given all of us this power to rise in thought to broad and true views of life, and has instructed us all by His Word, enabling us to see life's possibilities from a spiritual point of view, with a vision which looks beyond mere things of earth and includes more real eternal things.

The watchman stands on the walls. What is represented by the walls and foundations of Jerusalem? They represent the eternal truths on which the church is built and by which it is defended.-defended from attacks of spiritual enemies - the great and eternal truths of the Lord and heaven taught by the letter of the Divine Word. The truth of the Lord's divinity as confessed by Peter the Lord declared to be the stone on which His Church is built, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The foundations of precious stones seen by John in Revelation are the holy truths of the Lord's Word and teachings from it, which support and defend the Holy City.

This truth from the Lord's Word is the wall on which the spiritual watchman stands. It is this which gives him the vantage point from which to see life truly. It is as the Lord said through Ezekiel to the watchman of Israel: "Therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me." It is the Word of God that shows the way of eternal life, warns us of the dangers that threaten, and teaches us how we must live to be in harmony with the Lord and to find life's blessings. Without it we are blind. To a man living only on the ground of this natural world, absorbed wholly in worldly interests and cares, the world is all and the life of the body seems the only life. Death seems to such a man to be the end of all. But if we read and study the Word, we see that we are immortal beings, every event in life can contribute to our spiritual development and can help us lay up treasures in heaven.

The Scriptures teach that the spiritual side of life is most important here and now. The soul is more than the body, the spirit of the home is more than the house in which we live, our motives are more important than our outward deeds. We ought to be able to see that life's higher values are spiritual even now. The true watchman warns men against living only for this world.

Those who do not know about God think that events happen by chance and by human prudence. We are passing through changing times. From a merely natural appearance, looking out upon the world we see little but confusion, and little to give assurance of human peace and happiness in the future. Surely the outlook contains little hope. But let us go to the Word. Let us mount to our post on the wall of the Holy City. From the Word and from doctrine from the Word we learn of the Lord's victory over evil, how He came into the world and broke the yoke of evil, and that He is come again with a fuller opening of the Word to make His presence felt and to bring a healing power to all nations. If we read the Word, we know that the prophecies of the Word will be fulfilled, and that in the Lord's appointed time peace will be universal. We know that the Lord's providence is over every least and greatest thing. This the watchman sees from the walls and rebukes anxiety and fear and the folly of self-confidence.

If we are true watchmen, we shall live in the strength and in the courage of the prophecies of the Word, and help others to live in the strength and courage of them.

We should all be spiritual watchmen . We ought to have the power of lofty outlook. We ought to be those of whom Ezekiel writes: "I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me."

May we stand strong in the truth of the Lord's Word, that we may be faithful watchmen, able to help others, and in bright times and in dark show them how to look upon life from the spiritual, the true point of view which the Lord gives in His Word, watchmen who shall hear the Word at His mouth, and warn the people from Him.

And from this tower we ought to be able to see the light of a new day breaking, the coming of new spiritual life and power into the minds of men from a deeper understanding of the Word. For the watchmen of this new age are those who search the Scriptures concerning the Lord. They read the Word, see its glorious promises, and help others to see them. They live and help others to live in the confidence and courage of sure heavenly truth.

It is with these thoughts of the spiritual watchmen, the power of lofty outlook offered to all who will climb to the revealed heights within the Word of God that we read the promise and the charge spoken by Isaiah: "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." The Lord provides that there shall always be those who, standing strong in the truth of His Word themselves, shall be faithful watchmen to the people, warning them when enemies approach and proclaiming the dawn of a new and happy day. May the Lord, who has left us to do freely that which is good, increase our love for learning and doing His will. May He open our eyes, enlighten our minds, and give us strength and courage to walk steadfastly in the way of life ourselves, that His presence in our hearts may be recognized by others and His words on our lips may bring guidance and encouragement to all whom we can serve.

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith to Zion, Thy God reigneth!

"Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.

"Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

"The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."

Amen