



# Watch

Preparing for the unexpected

By

Philip Wren

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# **Watch – preparing for the unexpected**

Philip Wren

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## INTRODUCTION

### Cancelled due to lack of interest

The bridegroom fidgeted with his watch, glancing at the minute hand. Already 45 minutes late. The intermittent buzz of conversation was broken by periods of quiet. People were becoming restless. He looked at his best man for a clue as to what to do. A few more minutes passed. By now the bridegroom's stare was fixed on his shoes.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the minister coming towards him. Quietly the minister asked for someone to phone to see if there was a problem. The Best Man switched on his mobile phone and dialled the brides house. He was answered by a sleepy voice, "Oh, is that the time. I must have overslept."

Jesus told a similar story about 10 virgins waiting for a bridegroom. The story is set in a different culture and separated from our time by 2000 years. It would have had a similar affect on those who listened to Him as the situation described above has on us. How ridiculous! It is inconceivable that a bride who has any love for her husband would be asleep on her wedding day. It was also inconceivable that the bridal party of 2000 years ago would fall asleep. Those who heard Jesus must have thought that this time He had stretched the analogy too far.

As farfetched, as the parable may have seemed to Jesus' disciples, the story has proved prophetic. In these days leading up to the Bridegroom's return, most Christians are asleep. There is little interest in the Second Coming. The enthusiasm of the early church which prompted Paul to speak of those 'who eagerly await the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ', or to call the event 'our blessed hope' no longer exists.

If a bridegroom were treated in the way described in our opening story, he would cancel the wedding. Fortunately Jesus will stand by His word. His promise is to return. Nothing, not even a sleeping bride, will prevent that glorious day when all eyes will see him coming in majesty.

### **Excluded from the feast**

In the parable of the 10 virgins half are barred from the wedding feast. When they try to enter the door is slammed in their face. In another parable Jesus warns of a man being thrown out due to entering the feast without the proper clothes.

As the time of Jesus' return rapidly draws near many Christians are in danger of being excluded. They lack the teaching which could guide them through the final turbulent years. They have adopted the ideas and values of the kingdom of this world. Eventually some will be deceived and side with those who oppose God. Having disowned Him, He will disown them.

In these closing years we must watch if we are to secure our salvation.

### **Always Ready**

As Christians we are called to always watch and be ready. No one knows when our Lord will come either for each of us as individuals or to the earth at His Second Coming. Whether we live to see His return or are called up to be with Him before that time, the command is to watch. This book explores what it means to watch and always be ready.

The title of this book is 'Watch – preparing for the unexpected'. There is nothing unexpected about the return of Christ. When Jesus ascended into heaven the angels declared, *"this same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come again in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven"*. Acts 1: 11. His return is a certainty. The

unexpected, for which we are always to be prepared, relates only to the time of his return.

### **The Interpretation of Scripture**

Before we begin, a word on the approach to the interpretation of scripture on which these conclusions are based. "The true meaning of scripture is the natural and obvious meaning, by which we ought resolutely to abide." John Calvin on Galatians 4:22. The author has sought to find the simplest and most obvious meaning of scripture in all that follows. Whether he has succeeded or had his understanding clouded by preconceived interpretations the reader must judge.

There is the question of whether prophecy is to be taken as allegorical or literal? It is a matter of discernment to decide which is intended in each particular case. The principle adopted in what follows is that, Scripture is to be taken literally in every instance where the content does not clearly and unmistakably show that it is allegorical or metaphorical.

Another principle applied to this study is that scripture is to be used to interpret scripture, for the whole of scripture works together to reveal God's truth.

## WATCH

To watch is to gain the strength to stand when times of testing come.

On the night He was betrayed Jesus took His disciples out of Jerusalem across the Kidron valley to the garden of Gethsemane. There He asked them to watch with Him. He goes on a little further to pray. Coming back He finds the disciples asleep. He responds, *“What? Could you not watch with Me, one hour? Watch and pray lest you enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* Matthew 26: 40,41.

Jesus goes away to pray a second and third time. Each time on coming back He finds His disciples asleep. It was now too late to speak to the disciples again, for the time of His betrayal had come.

### **The flesh is weak**

Jesus was not commenting on their tiredness when He said, *“the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak”*. He was not saying, O, you poor things you have had such a tiring day and after a good meal it is no wonder that you are sleepy. Jesus knew their hearts. Peter had declared a short time earlier, *“Even if I die with You, I will not deny you.”* That was an absolutely genuine declaration of loyalty. In his heart he would never deny Jesus. Peter’s spirit was willing but in the time of crisis about to come his flesh would be weak. He would not be able, in his own strength, to resist the coming temptation. What was true for Peter was true for all the disciples.

When Jesus asked His disciples to watch with Him He was asking them to pray. They needed to come before the Father and ask for strength to stand firm in the time of trial.

**“Watch and pray lest you enter into temptation”.**

Jesus had already spoken to the disciples about the temptation that would come on them that night. *“All of you will be made to stumble because of me this night”, Matthew 26: 31.* They would stumble and deny Him. Not long before they had acknowledged Him to be the Son of God now they would run away fearing for their lives. On that balmy evening in Gethsemane the disciples were blissfully unaware of the coming crisis. They went to sleep.

Jesus had also explained what was going to happen to Him. *“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again”. Matthew 20:18,19.* The disciples had ignored this clear warning. When the crisis came they were unprepared and fled.

What an encouragement it would have been to Jesus if His disciples had watched and gained the strength to stand with Him. It would not have changed the outcome but it would have made it a little easier to bear. He was a man facing a cruel painful death. Jesus was alone; none of those closest to him understood what was going on in his heart. He looked but found no one to stand with Him.

This sad event comes not long after Jesus had spoken to the disciples of the importance of watching in connection with His return. In the Sermon on the Mount of Olives, He repeatedly told the disciples that His servants must watch for the master’s return. If there is one word which sums up all Jesus’ teaching on the end of the age and His return it is ‘watch’. Failure to watch will leave the church weak and unprepared for those things that Jesus warns us must come about. The church which does not watch is destined to fail just as the disciples failed.



## Gethsemane teaches us how to watch

Gethsemane is a lesson on how we are to understand the call to watch. Before the resurrection came the crucifixion. Before the Second Coming will come the tribulation (Matt 24: 21). In those dark hours when Jesus was on trial, condemned, crucified and laid in the tomb the disciples needed strength to stand. If only they had listened to the warnings they would have taken courage. When Jesus said that he would be delivered to the gentiles to be crucified He also said that he would rise again. The night would precede the triumph. Apparent defeat would herald the victory.

On that evil night Jesus watched. He spent time in prayer with his Father. The cup of suffering could not be removed but a sure hope was set before Him. *“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12: 2 KJV.* He saw the joy that would come out of His sacrifice. Because of that promised joy He was able to endure the cross.

We need to focus on the Second Coming if we are to stand and not give in to temptation in these final days. The night will come before the dawn. But the dawn will come and the fulfillment of all our hopes will be realised. Throughout scripture the focus is on the return of Christ not the trials which will precede His coming. That does not mean that the trials will not come. The joy set before Him enabled Jesus to endure the cross. The assurance of the glory which is to be ours will enable us to hold fast to our faith.

Jesus knew that the disciples would not stand. He had warned that the sheep would be scattered. But for the age in which we live He leaves us with a question: *“However, when the Son of man comes will He find the faith on the earth?” Luke 18: 8.* If the disciples had watched they would not have been scattered. Will the church in these last days

watch? The answer to that question will determine whether Jesus will find faith. If believers watch, if they take His warnings seriously, then there will be the faith on this earth when Jesus comes in glory.

We need to learn the lesson from Peter. He thought that he could stand in his own strength and so he fell. Today many ignore the warnings about the last days and think that come what may they will stand. Beware, due to ignorance they may fall.

WE ARE TO WATCH SO THAT WHEN THE FINAL HOUR OF TRIAL COMES ON THIS WORLD WE HAVE STRENGTH TO STAND FIRM.

*“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when his glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.” 1 Peter 4: 12,13.*

## ANTICIPATION

Anticipation provides the motivation to keep watch.

As a child I eagerly looked forward to going on summer camps. These times of great fun and enjoyment were the highlight of my year. They didn't last long enough but telling everyone about all that we got up to prolonged the enjoyment. The year passed and then gradually the time to go on camp came round again. As the time got nearer the anticipation became greater. Although my parents did most of the packing and arranging one thing was certain, when the time for camp came round, I would be ready. Camp filled me with anticipation.

As a man that anticipation has dulled. Life has become a routine filled with many responsibilities. Yes there are things to look forward too but never with the same excitement that is known to children.

### ***Eagerly waiting***

*"... eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 1: 7*

The church as it has grown old has also lost the excitement centred on the Second Coming of Christ. Reading the letters of St Paul, it seems that he took it for granted that Christians would be filled with anticipation at the prospect of the return of Christ. Recent translations of the Bible have inserted the word eagerly in front of waiting (1 Cor 1:7, Ph 3:20, Heb 9:28). This is a more accurate translation of the Greek word *apekdechomai*, which signifies expectant, eager anticipation of a desired event.

The New Testament church was enthusiastic and expectant. In those early years they had seen the world turned upside down through the power of the gospel (Acts 17:6). Within a few decades faith in Christ

had spread across most of the Roman world and beyond. Surely the task of making disciples of all nations would be quickly completed. Therefore they could live in the expectation that soon Jesus would return to claim the kingdom for His own.

The passing of time has dulled that anticipation. In the parable of the talents (Matt 25: 14-30) Jesus describes himself as a nobleman going off to receive a kingdom. He hints that he may be away a long time. But this long! It is now nearly 2000 years since He left. Centuries of history have passed and so much has happened to the world. It is a very different place to the one that Jesus left all those years ago. Are we still expected to live in the anticipation of Jesus' return? Maybe 2000 years will become 3000 or even 4000. Is He ever coming back?

### **The blessed hope**

*"Looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ;" Titus 2:13*

Titus was commissioned by Paul to set in order the church in Crete. One of the tasks assigned to him is the appointment of a godly leadership to guide the churches. The leaders were to become living examples of the doctrine that they profess. Not just the leaders but all the members were to practically work out their salvation in their daily lives. How are they to be encouraged to live up to the standards expected of them? The answer is to look for the 'blessed hope'. Keep focused on the eternal destiny for which they are being prepared.

Looking for the glorious appearing of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ is part of living a self-controlled, righteous and godly life.

In this present age we experience decay. The effect of sin takes its toll on our bodies, which age and wear out. Creation is also subject to the bondage of death. Pain and suffering, toil and tears abound. Through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross we are saved from the guilt

of sin. Through the Holy Spirit entering into our lives we can have victory over sin. Still to come is the day when we will be liberated from the effect of sin. That day of liberation is our blessed hope. When our God and Saviour Jesus Christ appears we will be transformed. Our present mortal bodies will be changed into immortal bodies. Sin and death will no longer have any power over us.

Some say that to be focused on the things to come is an escape from our responsibilities here and now. On the contrary, Scripture declares it to be a prime motivator for godly living. This life becomes a preparation for a glorious future. In the words of Paul, the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which will be revealed in us (Rom 8:18). We wait eagerly for the adoption, the redemption of our body (Rom 8:23). All that is promised to us will become ours on that wonderful day when Jesus returns.

On that wonderful day we will share in Christ's glory. *"When Christ who is our life appears then you also will appear with Him in glory. Colossians 3:4.* We will be a new creation prepared to enjoy eternity with the Father and the Son.

### **The coming kingdom**

When speaking to His disciples on the Mount of Olives, Jesus explained that the period of time between His ascension and glorious return would not be an age of peace. There would be wars and rumours of wars, nation rising against nation, famines, earthquakes and plagues. All these things will continue. Scripture does not offer any hope of the church ushering in a golden age. The disciples of Christ are commissioned to take the good news to a sinful rebellious world. The gospel will be preached to all nations and rejected. The bearers of good news will find that, like their Master before them, they are hated.

That the world will reject us, and the good news we bring, should not cause distress. We have understood from the beginning that we are

no longer of this world. *“For our citizenship is in heaven from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.”* Philippians 3: 20. Some have hoped that the preaching of the gospel to the nations would usher in the kingdom. That has always proved a false hope leading to discouragement. The true hope of the church is the glorious appearing. Our blessed hope is that Jesus when He comes will establish His kingdom. Then, and not before, will start the promised age of peace when war is no more.

On that day creation will be set free from its slavery to corruption. It will be renewed by the power of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:21). Wars will be no more (Isa 2:2-4), famine forgotten (Amos 9:13), disease will be a thing of the past (Isa 65:20). The natural world will be brought into perfect harmony (Isa 11:6-9). A golden age of peace will dawn when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea (Hab 2: 14).

### **He will serve us**

The redemption of our bodies and the establishment of the kingdom should fill us with anticipation, but there is more promised to those who are faithful. *“Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat and will come and serve them.”* Luke 12: 37.

When Jesus comes again He will provide a wedding feast for all who have trusted Him. For those who have been faithful in the final hour He will come and personally serve them. They will have the privilege of being treated as the most honoured guests at the feast.

And again of the faithful servant Jesus says, *“Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly I say to you he will make him ruler over all his goods.”* Matthew 24:46, 47. The faithful servant is the one who looks after the household. It is in the

dark hours of persecution that this faithfulness is most crucial. In the final days of the age when darkness descends over all the earth those who faithfully care for the flock will be greatly rewarded and given responsibilities when Jesus returns. Those who understand the times and have listened to the warnings will be the ones equipped to feed the household and to safeguard it in the time of trouble.

The first step in our preparation for the unexpected is to keep focused on the blessed hope of the church. A person who is living in the anticipation of the Second Coming will be prepared.

Anticipation is a strong motivation to watch.

*“To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.” Hebrews 9: 28.*

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice though now for a little while, if need be you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith being more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise and honour and glory at the time of revelation of Jesus Christ.”*

*1 Peter 1: 3 – 7.*

## **ALERT**

We must remain alert for we do not know the time of Jesus' return.

*"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going into a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning, lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And I say to you all watch." Mark 13: 32 – 37.*

Watch, watch, watch, the importance of watching in connection with the Second Coming could not be emphasised more strongly. The master in the parable expects to find his servants ready for his return. He tells them that he is going to a far country. Therefore he will be away for a long time. But even so they are to remain alert, always ready for his return no matter what time of day or night it may be.

Sometimes it seems that Christians have reversed the roles. It is thought that Jesus is there to serve the church. Surely it is unreasonable for Him to expect the believers to always be living in the prospect of His imminent return. It is so inconvenient when there are many other things to do.

Jesus is the Master, we are His lowly servants. If the master expects his servants to stay up all night on the off chance that he should return, they stay up all night. If Jesus expects the church to be ready for His return, throughout the time He is away, then Christians are to remain alert. However He is not being unreasonable but seeking to protect His followers from the dangers of falling asleep.



## The Jewish Wedding

*"No one knows the day or hour .....only the Father,"* this statement is taken from the traditions of the Jewish wedding as they existed at the time of Jesus. After the betrothal the bridegroom returns to his own house to prepare a place for his bride. When the appointed time, usually a year, is complete the bridegroom will be eager to go to claim his bride. However he cannot go until his father decides that all is ready.

The bride would know that the time for the bridegroom to return has been completed. She would be dressed and waiting expectantly. However she would never quite know when the groom would come. She would be eagerly looking and listening in expectant hope for the slightest sign that her beloved was on his way.

Jesus is coming for a bride. As a submissive Son He will be obedient to His Father's will and wait the Father's time. The Church should, like the Hebrew bride, be looking, longing for the slightest hint that her betrothed is on His way. In Israel the coming of the bridegroom was announced by the sounding of a trumpet and the cry "Behold the bridegroom comes". When the bridegroom's party arrived at the bride's home they would literally pick her up and carry her away to the wedding feast. So too when Jesus comes back, the trumpet will sound to announce His coming. The angels will then catch us up and carry us away to be with Jesus at the wedding feast (1 Thess 4: 16,17).

## Like a thief

The return of Jesus is described as a thief. *"For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night" 1 Thessalonians 5: 2.* In this passage Paul is reminding the Thessalonians that the world will be taken by surprise by the coming of Christ. It will happen at a time when they least expect it. But the brethren will not be taken by surprise. *"But you brethren, are not in darkness, so that this day should overtake you as a thief." 1 Thessalonians 5: 4.* We know

about these things and will be expecting it, provided we do not drop asleep but continue to watch (verse 6).

Jesus also spoke of His coming like a thief. *“But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house be broken into.”* *Matthew 24: 43*. In contrast to the master of the house we are to be ready.

Earlier in Matthew’s gospel Jesus reflects on his being called Beelzeboul by the Pharisees. He says *“if they have called the master of the house Beelzeboul .....”* (*Matt 10:25 NKJV*). This is a play on words, one of the meanings of Beelzeboul is ‘master of the house’. Jesus, the true Master of the House, is accused of being the Prince of Demons, the false claimant to that title.

In Matthew 24 Jesus keeps to this reversal of roles. He, the thief, comes to break into the house. His object is to catch the false master of the house, Satan, unawares. Jesus the true master of the house is coming to claim what is his own. Satan the false master will do everything he can to prevent Him.

### **For our protection**

The purpose of this illustration is to explain why the timing of Jesus’ return is kept as a closely guarded secret that cannot be revealed. For our protection there must be an element of surprise in order to catch the strong man off guard. The secret is designed to confuse Satan.

In consequence we as followers of Christ must always remain alert. From the study of prophecy we may draw conclusions with regard to the events, which will precede the Second Coming. God has given this information for our benefit and encouragement. But whatever conclusions we draw, we are to recognise that He will come when none of us expect it (*Matt 24: 44*).

Jesus told another parable about some wicked vine dressers (Matt 21: 33 – 40). It was addressed to the Jews who thought that if they killed the Son they could seize the inheritance. In the same way if the world thought that Jesus would soon return they would set about exterminating His followers. Men could then claim this world for their own.

Satan knows that one purpose of Jesus' return is to reign on the throne of David. For this reason the Jews suffered terribly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If there are no Jews there will be no nation for Jesus to reign over. Satan's one desire is to thwart God's word.

In frustration at God's preservation of the Jews Satan turns on all the followers of Christ. He will try to destroy the bride for which the Bridegroom longs to come (Revelation 12: 17). To protect the Bride God will bring confusion to the camp of the enemy. He will come at a time when they don't expect.

### **The time cut short**

Jesus said, *"for the elect's sake those days will be shortened."* Matthew 24: 22. If the time is shortened it implies that it will not be allowed to run its full course. Therefore prophecy may be fulfilled in a totally different way to that which we expect. With the secrecy that the Father has decided to shroud the timing and the prospect of the times being cut short we can live in the expectation of the Second Coming while preparing for suffering. The quotation from Mark's gospel with which we began this chapter stresses that we do not know when the Master will return. We must remain alert so that at all times we will be ready.

### **A Snare**

*"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and cares of this life, and that the Day*

*come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the earth. Watch therefore, and pray that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.” Luke 21: 34 – 36.*

The coming of the Lord will be like a trap for this world. A trap is never expected. The Second Coming will reveal the world’s sin. It will expose all that is unrighteous and in rebellion against God. We could complacently think that we are in no danger from falling into this trap. It is the world who will be caught out not us. Jesus warns that if we fail to watch and pray we may also fall into the trap. We watch and pray so that whenever the final hour comes we have the strength to stand firm.

### **Focused**

*“Therefore prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 1: 13 NASB*

The return of Christ should be central to our hope as Christians. All our actions should be influenced by the expectation that one day we will stand before the Son of Man. We are to fix our hope on the grace that will be ours at his coming and not be distracted by all the clamour of this world. Minds prepared for action, sober in spirit, creates the image of a soldier preparing to go into battle. We are all on active service especially in these last days. Watch and pray that we will be equipped for the battle.

### **When**

There is a debate over the timing of the return of our Lord to gather up his saints; an event usually referred to as ‘the rapture’. This book places this event at the last possible time allowed by scripture, which is as Jesus descends to set foot on the Mount of Olives.

Some will wish to argue about this, insisting that Jesus will come for His bride much earlier. The pre-tribulation rapture of the church is probably the most widely held interpretation among those who study prophecy. My own conclusion is that the gathering of the church at the time when Jesus physically returns to the Mount of Olives is the simplest and most straightforward interpretation of scripture. The considerable information given in scripture regarding the closing years was not given to satisfy idle curiosity but to encourage and equip the saints during the time of testing. We need to know what the Father has chosen to reveal to us so that we are not taken by surprise.

Jesus said, *"the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."* Matt 24:24. That statement tells me not to be dogmatic either way. At what point in time Jesus comes is for the Father alone to decide. His coming will be unexpected and therefore whatever view we hold we are probably wrong. We are to live in the expectation of Jesus coming back while at the same time listening to his warning to constantly watch so that we will be prepared.

One thing which we are told is that holy conduct and godly living can hasten that glorious day when Jesus brings judgement on this sinful world and ushers in the Kingdom of Heaven (2 Pet 3:11-12)

Maran-atha, come Lord Jesus.

## **AWAKE**

Those who are asleep cannot watch. When asleep we know nothing of the conscious world. We live in our dreams which are a distortion of reality. When awake we see clearly and can keep watch.

Taking the illustration of the Jewish wedding that we used in the previous chapter, let us imagine that when the bridegroom's party arrives they find the bride and her companions fast asleep. This is supposed to be the day, which the bride has been looking forward to for the last year. And yet when the trumpet sounds and the cry goes up no one is ready.

The bride should have spent the previous year preparing for this day. She would have made beautifully embroidered clothes to wear. When the betrothal time is completed she would be dressed and ready to go out to meet the Bridegroom. The home would be a buzz of excitement and anticipation. The brides' attendants would keep going to the windows to see if there was any sign of the bridegroom coming. How could they sleep on such a day as this? Even at midnight or the early hours of the morning they would be awake. This is to be the Brides special day when all will see her in her beauty and share in her joy.

But when the Bridegroom comes He finds His bride asleep. She has not even changed but is still in her work clothes. Wouldn't he ask does she really love me? Were all those sacrifices and preparations he had made worth it. We would like to respond that it couldn't be like that. It is impossible that a bride should be so careless and insulting to one who loves her so much.

## Sleeping Virgins

We move on to a story in which Jesus anticipates that this is exactly how He will find the church, His bride, when He returns. *“But while the bridegroom was delayed they all slumbered and slept” Matthew 25: 5.*

To the disciples this story of the virgins must have sounded ridiculous. It just wouldn't happen. It was too farfetched to imagine the bridal party falling asleep. But the disciples themselves proved the point by falling asleep at the very time when they were needed most. They had been warned and told what would happen, but hadn't taken it in.

At a time when Christians should be awake looking for the signs of the Bridegroom coming and filled with anticipation of all that is about to happen, they will fall asleep. Like the disciples in Gethsemane they will be completely unaware of the significance of events. If there is no understanding of the times Christians will cease to remain alert.

The story of the ten virgins ends with half the virgins not being allowed to enter the wedding celebration. Why are they excluded? Is the story describing the difference between real and nominal Christians? Or is it about those who rely on good works or the faith of others instead of having a living faith of their own? Neither explanation fits the description of these people. They all have the qualities of real faith.

They are virgins. This represents purity and tells us that they have been cleansed from their sin by the blood of the lamb. The oil represents the Holy Spirit. Therefore they have been born again of the Spirit. They are waiting for the bridegroom and have been invited to the wedding feasts. The description can only apply to those who have faith in Christ.

## **Rejected**

And yet when the time comes to enter the wedding feast, half of the virgins have the door slammed in their face! The bridegroom will not even recognize who these people are! The reason given is that they ran out of oil and so were not ready at the time of the bridegroom's arrival. If this parable is telling us that some born again Christians may be excluded from the wedding feast then it is truly a wakeup call.

The wise virgins, like the foolish, were asleep but they had the reserves of oil to see them through the night ready for the Bridegroom's coming. These are Christians who have listened to and obeyed Jesus. They have understood that to follow Jesus they are to deny themselves and take up their cross (Mark 8: 34). Having died to the world it can no longer harm them.

In this world there are many Christians who have experienced and come through suffering. They may not be as attentive as they should to the signs of the times and lack awareness that the time for Christ's return is drawing near. But they have already been refined in the fires. Having tasted tribulation and persevered they will stand as the night draws on.

The lack of oil informs us that the foolish virgins were unprepared. It is in the western world that we most need to take this warning seriously. For too long we have been accustomed to comfort and respectability. We imagine that our ease is the normal state of the church. It is not. When the times of trial hit us we will be ill prepared to stand. Like the disciples we may well run away denying our Lord and Saviour. Jesus said that *"...whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven."* Matthew 10: 33.

The Christians described as foolish virgins had not listened to the warnings in the Bible. They perhaps thought that they would be taken out of the world and not suffer the persecution that will come. Or they



thought that all this teaching on prophecy was too confusing and therefore to be ignored. Others are too busy with their involvement in the world to notice the signs that all is about to change. Some think like Peter that come what may they will stand. No, now is the time to watch and get ready so that we can welcome the Bridegroom when He comes. Now is the time to wake up and seek the Father's strength so that when the trials come we will stand firm and not deny Jesus.

*"For if we died with Him,*

*We shall also live with Him,*

*If we endure,*

*We shall also reign with Him.*

*If we deny Him*

*He also will deny us*

*If we are faithless,*

*He remains faithful;*

*He cannot deny Himself."*      *2 Timothy 2: 11 –13*

Jesus can cope with failures. After his denial Peter was restored. If Jesus were unable to restore failures then there would be no hope for any of us. The denial of which Jesus and these verses speak is actually betrayal. It is the following in the footsteps of Judas and siding with the enemies of Christ. *"And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.....the love of many will grow cold."* *Matthew 24: 10, 12.* We are warned that betrayal will be widespread in these last days. Those who betray will not enter the wedding feast.

### **Closed Minds**

The disciples minds were closed to the truth that Jesus taught because they held to the wrong preconception of what He had come to

do. They looked for an earthly kingdom, a kingdom in which they would be chief ministers. Their minds were closed to the idea of a king who would let Himself be crucified. Judas felt this most keenly. He wanted a leader to rise up against the Romans. But when Jesus made clear that He would follow another path, Judas saw no alternative but to betray Him. The others were just unprepared.

Many today seek that same earthly kingdom. They believe that the church is destined to transform the world. They are vigorous, active and outspoken in their plans to build this kingdom but in the sight of God they are asleep and in danger of being deceived. They plan great things but fail to understand the ways of God. Their minds are closed to the idea that it is in the purposes of God that his church will be allowed to suffer. God sent His beloved Son to die on the cross. In these last days He asks the Son's beloved bride to suffer a little and be rejected, to be hated by all nations. In suffering the bride will be made beautiful through her faithfulness. She will overcome and share in Christ's victory.

### **Wake Up**

*"Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober." 1 Thessalonians 5: 6.* The contrast between being asleep and awake is similar to the difference between being drunk and sober. The sober person is alert and aware. The drunk is unaware of what is going on around him. His drunkenness is an escape from the world, a quest for pleasure in an otherwise miserable life. Those who are asleep have no concept of coming judgement. They believe that the world will continue as it has done especially as man gains increasing control over the world in which he lives. The worldly minded think that the pleasures of this world are the best that is on offer and immerse themselves in self-seeking enjoyment.

We are not to be like them. Those who are of the day are to be filled with faith and love, motivated by the hope of salvation. We have experienced the life in all its fullness which comes through submission to Jesus Christ. Once that satisfaction has been tasted, the pleasures of the world are empty and no longer attractive. We are on our guard knowing that this world is destined for an outpouring of wrath. We have studied scripture and see the warning signs of coming judgement. From the beginning Jesus warned that when he comes again it would be in fierce anger to bring justice to an evil world.

*“Now it is high time to awake out of sleep for our salvation is nearer than when we first believed... But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfil its lusts.” Romans 13:11, 14.* Those who are awake will escape the wrath. They have purified themselves casting off the works of darkness to walk in the light.

To watch we need to stand apart from the world in order to see clearly. Set apart is the subject which we will deal with in the next chapter.

## **APART**

If our treasure is all in this life we will not watch. The coming of Jesus is a threat that we would rather ignore. When He comes we will either have to leave our old life behind or be left behind.

### **Left Behind**

A well known story from the Old Testament is the judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah. God had heard the outcry from the peoples of the earth about the wickedness of these two cities. He sends two angels to investigate. The situation in the cities is as bad as reported and so there is no alternative but to send judgement. This story reminds us that God is serious when He warns of judgement. We need to take the warnings seriously and be ready to escape His wrath.

In the cities Lot and his family still seek to serve the Lord. The angels warn Lot, his wife and two daughters to flee or the judgement will overtake them. Lot encourages his two sons in law to escape with him but they think that he is daft. Like the world today they cannot conceive that God may actually intervene in judgement. When Lot and his family dither the angels grab their hands and drag them out of the city. They are told to run to safety.

Jesus uses this story to deliver one of his most serious warnings about the need to watch and be prepared in the last days. The terrible warning is expressed in just three words, *“Remember Lot’s wife”*. *Luke 17:32*. Lot’s wife looked back. She hesitated and was destroyed in the judgement. She looked back because her life and treasure were in the city. She could not leave it all behind.

*“Even so will it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the*

*field, let him not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life shall preserve it. I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed; the one will be taken, and the other will be left. Two will be grinding together; the one will be taken, and the other left. Two will be in the field; the one will be taken, and the other left." Luke 17: 30 – 36.*

On the day when Jesus appears in glory and gathers his church some are going to be left behind. In the context of this passage it is clear that Jesus is not speaking about unbelievers being left behind as is commonly imagined. He is warning those who should, like Lot's wife, be taken to a place of safety. These are believers who should be on their way to be with Jesus. They should be receiving their inheritance and entering into eternal life. Instead they hesitate and suffer wrath.

This is not as might first appear a momentary confusion or hesitation due to not knowing what to do. It is the product of a heart fixed on the things of this world. In the western world we have grown accustomed to enjoying both the best of this world and the hope of things to come. In consequence we have become earthly minded and in great danger.

Our present day apostate worldly church includes many that risk being left behind. Their treasure is on earth and as Jesus said their hearts are there also. When the angels come to gather them up they will slip away to go to their beloved possessions. They will seek to hang on to their life in this world and so lose their life in the world to come.

### **Treasure in heaven**

We should thank God for all the good things that he has given us in this life. Possessions can be a blessing. They can also be a curse. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught how to prevent possessions from becoming a curse that will keep us from the kingdom (Matthew 6: 19 – 34). The one word that sums up his teaching is generosity. A

willingness to share all we have. Not worrying about the future but, if we are able, to meet the needs of others today. This will become especially important during the final years of this age, when the church is hated and oppressed by all nations. Many Christians will have little to live on, due to being isolated from society. Those who still have will be called on to share. Share and not worry about how they will provide for tomorrow. That worry is to be left with God.

Living in obedience to Christ in this matter will ensure that we have much treasure in heaven. If our treasure is in heaven we will be eager to go with the angels to receive our wealth. Keep focused on the coming of the Lord and our attitude to money will change.

*“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” 1 John 2:15 – 17.*

## **Come Out**

*“Come out of her my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.” Revelation 18: 4 NASB*

Revelation chapter 18 describes the fall of Babylon the Great, mother of Harlots. Who is this Babylon that we are to come out of, and how do we leave?

Babylon represents the kingdom of this world that has, throughout history, been in opposition to God and to all those who belong to the Kingdom of Heaven. Sometimes she is religious, sometimes secular. She can deny the existence of God or act in extreme religious fanaticism. She builds empires and loves to display her pomp. She is absorbed by her power and her achievements. She trades and revels in her wealth

whether it be gold and jewels or weapons of war and the lives of men. She rewards her servants well with all the luxuries that this world can offer. The world calls her civilisation. But what is meant by civilisation is often a mask for injustice and exploitation.

To come out of her we must live by the values and laws of God's kingdom. Babylon looks always to its own advantage, the pursuit of wealth being her delight. She does not care if that wealth is built on cruelty and corruption. The Kingdom of Heaven teaches us to care for others, to be concerned for justice and be glad when the poor are set free from suffering. Our delight is to serve the Lord and to teach others His ways.

*"For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that is now and of that which is to come." 1 Timothy 4: 8.*

### **Godliness**

We are also to be separate in the conduct of our lives. *"Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found in him in peace, without spot and blameless, and consider the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation." 2 Peter 3:14.* The things to which Peter is looking forward is the day of the Lord which comes as a thief in the night. A day which brings with it destruction and judgement on an unsuspecting world.

In this letter Peter explains his merging the day of the Lord with the final destruction of the earth by saying that, *"with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as one day", 2 Peter 3:8.* He admits that a thousand years intervenes between the two events he has merged together but with the Lord such times are not significant. The important issue is how are we to live recognising that judgement is to come and this world is not our permanent home?

We are to be holy and godly in our lives always keeping in mind that a day of judgement is coming. Godliness involves both knowing and obeying God's revealed truth. It is allowing the Holy Spirit to transform us into sons and daughters pleasing to the Father.

*"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Romans 12: 2.*

Godliness will inevitably mean conflict with the world. In these last days the world will be set on a path of wickedness seeking to reject God and take control of its destiny. Those who live in obedience to the Father will be persecuted. They will become outcasts and be scorned. Some insist that we must be part of the world in order to witness. In these last days the true church will be a community set apart. As such, as we will see later, the bride will become a powerful witness.

*"..and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one." Hebrews 10: 34 NASB.* If we have let go of this world and become citizens of the Kingdom of God the loss of worldly possessions is no longer significant. We can let go because we trust Him to take us to a better kingdom.

*"Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For we have no continuing city, but seek the one to come." Hebrews 13:12,13.*

We are not to love this world. Once called out by Christ we are to live as strangers passing through. We seek a heavenly city, which is our real home and are no longer part of the world but set apart.



## AWARE

In the last days deception will increase. We need to watch and be aware that even the elect may be deceived.

Many years ago I knew someone who seemed very pleasant. He was very entertaining to talk to, coming out with many stories and anecdotes. I had lost contact with him by the time an article in a newspaper was brought to my attention. The article concerned a trial at the Central Criminal Courts. In pronouncing sentence on the accused the judge remarked at his remarkable ability to convince people that he was someone who he clearly was not. It was my former acquaintance who had caused even the judge at his trial to comment on his ability as a con man. From that experience I learnt that the skill of the con man is to tell people what they want to hear in the way they want to hear it.

### Many deceivers

*“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” Matthew 24: 24.* Is it possible to deceive the elect? In the sermon that follows, Jesus places, great emphasis on watching, this leads to the conclusion that the answer has to be yes. It is possible to deceive the elect if they cease to watch. Sadly the extent to which people are taken in by apparently supernatural signs reinforces this conclusion. Just as my con man acquaintance knew how to tailor what he said to the aspirations of his victims so Satan knows how to dress up his message to take in weak and unsuspecting Christians. There is a craving for supernatural signs among those who need external evidence to bolster their faith. When these signs are produced they are heralded as evidence of God being at work.

Jesus said that the deceivers will be able to perform great signs and wonders. *"See I have told you beforehand" Matthew 24:25.* Before Gethsemane Jesus had warned His disciples of all that would come about when he went up to Jerusalem. They did not listen to the warnings and were unprepared. We have been warned. We need not be deceived. Part of watching is to be aware that these things will happen in the last days.

### **A strong delusion**

Although there will be many deceivers, at the very end there will be one final deception. *"For this reason God will send on them strong delusion that they should believe the lie that they may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness."* 2 Thessalonians 2: 11, 12. Men led on by Satan have invented many delusions. Humanism pretends that man is God, Evolution dispenses with the need for a creator, Islam denies the Father and the Son. We could list many more. There is going to be one final delusion which will cause all who have not trusted God to follow the man of sin who is to come. Just before the above quote, the passage states that this man of sin will come with all the power, signs and lying wonders of Satan. His appearance will be both dramatic and convincing. Those who put their faith in miracles beware; even the elect may be deceived.

### **False Security**

*"For when they say, 'peace and safety!' then a sudden destruction comes upon them, as labour pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape."* 1 Thessalonians 5:3. People long for peace. Anyone who can achieve peace especially in the trouble spots of the world such as the Middle East will be acclaimed and accepted as a leader. Much of the church parrots back the world's desire for peace and imagines that the central mission of the church is to bring peace. There can be no peace outside faith in Jesus Christ. *"Do not think that I came to bring*

*peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.” Matthew 10: 34.* Peace will come when Jesus Christ returns to reign, not before. This present age from beginning to end will, as Jesus said, be characterised by wars and rumours of wars and nation rising against nation. Therefore do not be deceived by peace even when proclaimed by prominent Christian leaders. It will be a false peace leading to war.

### **Deception in the Church**

*“But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” 2 Timothy 3:13.* Do not assume that because you are part of a church, you are safe from deception. It is within that which calls itself the church that the worst deceptions occur. To list the deceptions and false ministries would take many books. Instead we will focus on the avoidance of deception.

The foundation of deception within the church has always been the undermining of confidence in the Word of God. *“Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree in the garden’?” Genesis 3: 1.* The posing of the question was sufficient to sow doubt in Eve’s mind. The word of God had never been questioned before. She was unprepared for the challenge. Once doubt had set in, Satan pressed home his challenge. From doubt, he moved to denial. *“You will not surely die” Genesis 3: 4.* From denial the final step was rebellion, *“you will be like God” Genesis 3: 5.*

The attack from within the church always begins with a questioning of trust in God’s word. It can be a direct attack on the reliability of scripture or an indirect attack, by setting up false dogmas and doctrines that are contrary to the word of God. A subtle attack can come through the reliance on Christian books and articles, instead of studying the Bible for oneself. In whatever way the attack comes Satan wants to draw believers away from the Bible. In these last days a very serious failing within the church is ignoring the study of prophecy. Much

false teaching would readily be dismissed if there was an understanding of what scripture teaches about the coming of our Lord.

Regrettably, many in the church do not want to hear the truth. *“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to fables.”* 2 Timothy 4: 3, 4. They do not want to be challenged by the truth. These believers prefer popular preachers who bolster them in their comfortable life style, instead of questioning how they live or warning of trouble ahead.

Speaking of the Bereans, *“These were more fair minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”* Acts 17: 11. The message is quite simple. Even if St Paul were to come and preach at your church next Sunday, check it out to make sure that it conforms to the Bible. I find this especially important with the study of prophecy where often views, which cannot be found in scripture, are expounded with absolute conviction. There are many teachers who read into scripture what is not there and ignore what is plainly described. They bring confusion and lay believers open to deception. Test what is taught. Ask if it is the simplest interpretation of what is written, if it is not then treat it with caution.

*“Beloved do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone into the world.”* 1 John 4: 1. The context of this statement is the confession of Jesus Christ. Is Jesus central to what is being taught or is it a false Jesus that is being presented? Are we being exhorted to live lives that are Christ like or is conformity to the world taken for granted?

*“Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.”*

*Matthew 7: 15, 16.* A test of deception is the fruit of the ministry. Is it centred on the glory of the man or does it seek to glorify Christ? Does the ministry seek to amass wealth for itself often under the pretence of needing it for the Lord's work or is it content to allow the Lord to provide? Does it focus on its own ideas and endless controversies or seek to help people come into a simple understanding of the faith? Does it deny scripture and substitute false teaching? Does it dominate and control or does it rejoice as the disciples grow in faith and can stand on their own feet?

*"Beware lest you also fall from your steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked." 2 Peter 3: 17.*

Deceptions within the church weaken faith and prepare the way for the acceptance of the strong delusion which comes at the end of the age.

We must be aware and watch so that we are not deceived.

## ALIVE

The dead Church does not watch. A consequence of not watching is a lack of interest in the Second Coming. A dead church will be taken by surprise when Jesus returns. Due to its lack of readiness it will share the same wrath as the rest of the world. Those who are alive look forward with joy to that great day when Jesus returns.

*"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead." Revelation 3: 1.*

A dead church may be large or it may be small. It may have a thriving programme with activities for all age groups. It may be good at promoting itself and run very effective evangelism programmes. But in the sight of God it is dead. The church in Sardis had a name for being alive although it was in reality dead.

Life comes through the Holy Spirit. It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives, which renews us and enables us to serve God. Without Him all our efforts are in vain. The church which no longer lets the Holy Spirit guide it is pronounced dead. Prayer and waiting on the Lord are replaced with activity. The remedy to going its own way is to watch.

*"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent." Revelation 3: 2,3.*

Some works started under the direction of the Holy Spirit. These continue but the Holy Spirit is no longer the one who is allowed to guide. That which is about to die can be brought back to life by watching

in prayer. As we devote ourselves to prayer, the Holy Spirit is able to restore and strengthen that work and reclaim it for the Lord. In our natural state we are dead. Only as we continually drink of the living water of the Holy Spirit will we be refreshed and kept alive. We must repent of our activity and good works for the Lord. Turn again to draw from the well of living water, drink and remember the gospel that saved us from death. Allow the Holy Spirit alone to work through us, that all our works may be pleasing to our Saviour.

*"Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Revelation 3: 3 – 6.*

The need to watch is underlined by the threat of the Lord's coming. The Lord comes as a thief to those He is going to judge. It is a threat that the dead church does not take seriously. In promising not to blot the names of the faithful out of the Book of Life the implication is clear. The names of the spiritually dead will be blotted out. We must watch.

The defiled garments tell us that those who refuse to watch have slipped back into the ways of the world. They are no longer clothed in the pure white garments which are the righteousness of Christ. They have gone their own way seeking their own righteousness. None will enter heaven on the merits of their own works. Only by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus will our names be confessed before the Father. The blood of Christ washes our garments stained by the filth of sin and turns them into the purest white.

Part of watching is to remain faithful to the gospel as received through the word of God. We can do that by devoting time to the study of Scripture asking the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth. It is important for every Christian to study the Bible for themselves. Allow the Holy Spirit to teach you and minimise the reliance on other books and commentaries. There are many churches where books by popular authors replace serious Bible study. Especially popular are those books that promise the secret of success, whether it be in church growth, business or relationships. Never let Christian books push the Bible to one side. Always spend more time reading and studying the Bible than you spend on other books. If you do this you will not be cast aside at the Second Coming.

### **Scoffers**

One of the marks of a dead church is the scoffer. Lacking reverence for the inspired word of God they revel in pulling it to pieces or setting up preposterous interpretations which suit their own addled minds. “*..... knowing this first, that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all these things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” 2 Peter 3: 3,4.*

The scoffer mocks the historic doctrines of the church such as the virgin birth, the incarnation and the atonement. Miracles are ridiculed. A particular source of fun are those who believe in a literal creation. The return of Christ is never mentioned. They cannot conceive that there may really be a God who will come in judgement. “*They wilfully forget.*” 2 Peter 3: 5. The scoffer rates the false knowledge of this world much higher than the revealed word of God. For them religion is no more than an intellectual game.

### **The Dead will not listen**



*"Also I set watchmen over you saying, listen to the sound of the trumpet! But they said, 'we will not listen'. .....Behold I will certainly bring calamity on this people, the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not heeded My words nor My law, but rejected it." Jeremiah 6: 17, 19.*

The dead being dull of hearing will fall under judgement. God has a calamity prepared for them. They do not want to hear the truth as that would disturb their sleep. Judah thought that it was being faithful to the Lord. It offered sacrifices and made offerings to God, but its heart was really in the world. It chased after other gods and made alliances with the surrounding nations. God was not deceived. Through Jeremiah He warned of the calamity prepared for the nation. God is not deceived by the present day dead church. Its unbelief will reap a reward of God's anger.

### **The contrast of those who are alive**

*"On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; all day and all night they will never keep silent. You, who remind the LORD, take no rest for yourselves; and give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth." Isaiah 62:6, 7 NASB.*

The alive perceive what God is doing in the world and participate in that work through intercession. God commands us to give Him no peace until He completes his work. Jerusalem will be a praise in all the earth when Jesus has come back to reign from the throne of David. Until that joyful time comes we are called to intercede for the church, the Jews and for the world

*"Your watchmen shall lift up their voices, with their voices they shall sing together; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord brings back Zion." Isaiah 55:8.* Those who watch and understand what God is doing in these last days will be filled with joy as they see his work being

brought to completion. The watchmen will rejoice as they see God working out his purposes.

### **Patient Endurance**

How are we to survive the dead church? Our Lord's brother James offers this advice: *"Therefore be patient, brethren until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rains. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren lest you be condemned. Behold the Judge is standing at the door!" James 5: 7 – 11.*

We are not to fret or be stirred up by the unbelief within the church. We are not to get angry when our beliefs are ridiculed. We must patiently endure. Taking every opportunity which present itself to encourage others to remain faithful, particularly look for opportunities to study the Bible together. By watching in prayer we will gain the strength to endure.

Even if we are all alone, with no one who understands, keep watch.

## ADORNED

Jesus is coming for a bride. The faithful church, which has maintained its watch, will be found as a beautiful bride, adorned with fine garments, worthy of her Saviour. In tribulation she will triumph making the victory of Christ complete. The faithful will be joined with the now repentant nation of Israel. Israel was the first to be betrothed to Jesus. We as gentile believers are invited to share in Israel's blessing. At the wedding feast we are to be both bride and guests with Jesus serving us.

We have already referred to the customs associated with the Jewish wedding. In that tradition, following betrothal, the bridegroom would go away to prepare a home for his bride. Meanwhile the bride would occupy her time embroidering a fine wedding gown. On the day when her bridegroom returns she would be radiantly beautiful for her husband. It should be our desire that when Jesus returns He will find a bride resplendent in righteousness.

### **Clothed in righteousness**

*"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints." Revelation 19: 7, 8 NSAB amended.*

All our own righteousness is as filthy rags, but the righteousness born out of faith is like precious jewels in the sight of our Lord. *"They shall be mine," says the lord of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. Malachi 3:17.* The jewels are those who fear the name of the Lord. In a world that rejects God and his word, these are the faithful who have not given way to unbelief. Of Israel, God said, *"For you are a*

*holy people to your Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples of the earth.” Deuteronomy 7:6.* Israel, with the church grafted in, will be a special treasure for the Lord.

Speaking about godly women, Peter identifies that it is inward transformation of our character that really delights God. *“Do not let your adornment be merely outward, arranging of hair, wearing gold or putting on fine apparel, rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. 1 Peter 3: 3, 4.* Jesus will return for a church which has passed through the fires of tribulation and been purified. Under trial she has shown the character of Christ, not through her own strength, but in the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Shining like the sun and stars**

Never doubt the glory which will be bestowed on those who watched and remained faithful. Jesus promised, *“Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun on the kingdom of their father.” Matthew 13:43.* This is the hope and the joy that will sustain those who overcome during the dark days that are to close this present age.

But the darkness will not be all gloom. In the book of Daniel we read, *“Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.” Daniel 12: 3.* Despite the darkness many will be turned to righteousness.

### **Reaping under opposition**

*“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for my names sake. .... And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come.” Matthew 24: 9, 14.*

Tribulation and harvest go hand in hand. During the final dark years the Church will complete its commission. The faithfulness of ordinary Christians under persecution will speak to the whole world. By our actions and the words that Jesus gives us we will declare the reality of our faith and our love for our Lord and Saviour. All will be able to understand, whether they speak our language or not. In this way the gospel will finally be preached to all nations.

There will come a time when the church is silenced. It is represented in scripture by the death of the two witnesses (Revelation 11: 7 – 10). The world will celebrate that at last it is rid of those who trouble its conscience. No longer are the peoples of the world tormented by those who call on them to submit to their Creator. From now on they can go their own way and make their own rules. Free of God their destiny is in their own hands.

The triumph of the peoples, tribes, tongues and nations will be short lived. After three and a half days the witnesses will be gathered up to heaven. A great cloud of people will arise with them. In his visions the Apostle John sees these people who form the final harvest from the earth.

### **The final harvest**

*“After these things I looked and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and tribe and peoples and tongues standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and palm branches in their hands;”.....“Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “These who are clothed in white robes, who are they, and where do they come from?” I said to him, “My lord you know”. And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Revelation 7: 9, 13,14. NASB*

These verses describe the final great harvest of this present age. Those who watched and gained the strength to stand will reap this harvest. Because of their witness people from every nation, tribe, people and tongue will stand in glory in the Kingdom of our God. The time of great testing and trial will be transformed into the finest hour of the Christian Church. It will be the glory of the church that watched.

Two thousand years ago Satan thought that he had won the victory over the meek Lamb of God. The one Satan feared was crushed and died. When Jesus was raised from the dead Satan's apparent victory became his greatest defeat.

At the close of this age another apparent satanic victory will be reversed. When Jesus gathers His own, the great multitude will be the evidence of Satan's defeat.

That is how it should be.

That is how Jesus longs for it to be.

But will it be like that?

Remember the question which Jesus posed, *"However when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" Luke 18: 8 NASB.*

Will He find a Church which has recognised that in its own strength it will fail like Peter? Will He find a church which has listened to the warnings and drawn from Him the strength to stand? Will He find a church that has recognised that His ways are not our ways?

**HE WILL IF WE OBEY HIS CALL TO WATCH.**

**COME LORD JESUS**

*"Behold I am coming like a thief. Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."*

*Revelation 16: 15*

## Promises to the Overcomers

Those who watch will in His strength overcome.

*“To Him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” Revelation 2: 7*

*“He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death”.  
Revelation 2: 11*

*“To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.” Revelation 2: 17*

*“And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations, ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like potters vessels’, as I have received from my Father; and I will give him the morning star.” Revelation 2: 26 – 29.*

*“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” Revelation 3: 5*

*“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him my new name.” Revelation 3: 12*

*“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”  
Revelation 3: 21*

Watch so that we may remain faithful and enter in to all the promises made by Jesus to those who overcome.

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Notes



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Trumpet Sounds has for more than 20 years published a quarterly newsletter commenting on the significance of world events in the light of Bible prophecy. The newsletter is available free of charge either by email or printed copy by post. To request a regular copy please use the contact email at the bottom of the page.

### **Our Beliefs**

We believe: in one God eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that Jesus Christ is God manifest as man, His virgin birth, His sinless human life, His atoning death and bodily resurrection, His ascension into heaven and His return in power and glory to judge the earth.

We believe: that salvation is only through faith in shed blood of Jesus Christ which paid the debt of our sin, that we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to lead a victorious Christian life, that all people who have ever lived will be raised from the dead some to eternal judgement and some to eternal life.

We believe that the Bible does not just contain but is the uniquely inspired and inerrant word of God. The Bible is the revelation of God's truth to men, truth which has been safeguarded by the Holy Spirit. We believe that the true meaning of scripture is the natural and most obvious interpretation. We pray that the Holy Spirit may lead us into that understanding and enable us to hold firmly to the truth.

The study of the prophetic events leading up to the return of Jesus Christ has suffered from many imposed systems of interpretation which have brought about considerable confusion within the church. We pray that the simplicity of the teaching of Scripture with regard to the Second Coming will be restored.

We pray that any who read this book who have not already trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ will be challenged to make that commitment. Further help is available from the email address below:

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