

**GRACE AND PEACE BE UNTO TO YOU FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND  
THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.**

**THE TEXT FOR TODAY'S SERMON IS TAKEN FROM THE READINGS  
AND THE GOSPEL READ MOMENTS AGO.**

**PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN CORINTH IS, IN  
VARIOUS RESPECTS, DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER LETTERS HE  
WROTE TO HIS CONGREGATIONS, BUT IT DOES NOT DIFFER GREATLY  
IN THE FORM OF ITS SALUTATION. IT OBSERVES THE LETTER-WRITING  
CUSTOM OF HIS DAY; FIRST, THE WRITER IDENTIFIES HIMSELF; NEXT,  
HE INDICATES TO WHOM HIS LETTER IS ADDRESSED; THE GREETING  
FOLLOWS. DID YOU NOTICE A SIMILARITY WITH MY GREETING TO YOU  
THIS MORNING?**

**IN INTRODUCING HIMSELF, THE WRITER GIVES HIS ADDRESSEES  
MORE THAN HIS NAME; HE ALSO IDENTIFIES HIS STATION AND RANK.  
THIS LETTER COMES NOT ONLY FROM PAUL, THE FORMER PASTOR OF  
THE CONGREGATION; IT ALSO COMES FROM PAUL, THE APOSTLE. HE  
EMPHASIZES HIS APOSTLESHIP. NOT ONLY DOES HE CALL HIMSELF AN  
APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST; HE ALSO STATES THAT HE WAS CALLED  
BY GOD TO BE AN APOSTLE, AND THAT IT WAS GOD'S WILL THAT HE BE  
AN APOSTLE. IN THREE DIFFERENT WAYS PAUL EMPHASIZES HIS  
DIVINE COMMISSION.**

**IT IS IMPORTANT FOR PAUL TO ESTABLISH HIS RANK AND HIS  
AUTHORITY AS HE WROTE THIS LETTER. FOR ONE THING, THIS  
CONGREGATION NEEDED MUCH CORRECTION; IN HIS LETTER PAUL  
WOULD BE CHASTISING THEM FOR A NUMBER OF SHORTCOMINGS AND  
TRANSGRESSIONS. FURTHERMORE, THERE WAS OPPOSITION TO PAUL  
WITHIN THE CONGREGATION. SOME DID NOT RATE HIM HIGHLY AS A  
PASTOR; OTHERS WERE EVEN ATTACKING HIM AND HIS MINISTRY.**

**UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES IT WAS NECESSARY FOR PAUL TO ESTABLISH HIS AUTHORITY OVER THEM. HE WAS GOD'S APOSTLE, COMMISSIONED BY GOD HIMSELF TO WRITE TO THEM. WHEN THIS APOSTLE SPOKE, THEY HAD BEST PAY ATTENTION; OTHERWISE THEY WOULD BE GUILTY OF REFUSING TO LISTEN TO GOD HIMSELF. ONE DOES NOT DISREGARD AN AMBASSADOR OF A GREAT KING.**

**NOW GOD IS SPEAKING TO US. "BE ON GUARD! STAY AWAKE!" JESUS SPOKE THESE WORDS ON THE TUESDAY OF HOLY WEEK, THE WEEK IN WHICH HE SUFFERED AND DIED FOR THE SINS OF THE WHOLE WORLD. JESUS SPENT MUCH OF THIS TUESDAY IN THE TEMPLE COURTS AT JERUSALEM. HERE THE LEADERS OF THE JEWS HAD QUESTIONED HIS AUTHORITY AS A TEACHER, AS MARK HAD TOLD US IN CHAPTER 11. THERE HE HAD ENTERED THE TEMPLE AND DROVE OUT THE MONEY-CHANGERS AND THOSE WHO SOLD PIGEONS. THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND THE SCRIBES AND THE ELDERS CAME TO HIM AND ASKED "BY WHAT AUTHORITY ARE YOU DOING THESE THINGS?"**

**ALTHOUGH THEIR QUESTION SEEMED HARMLESS, THEY WERE ACTUALLY SEEKING AN ANSWER WHEREBY THEY COULD EITHER RIDICULE HIM BEFORE THE PEOPLE OR ACCUSE HIM OF BLASPHEMY—THE VERY CHARGE THEY LATER BROUGHT AGAINST HIM.**

**THEY HAD FROM THE VERY START MADE UP THEIR MINDS ABOUT JOHN THE BAPTIZER BY REJECTING HIS BAPTISM FOR THEMSELVES. IN THEIR HEARTS THEY REJECTED BOTH JOHN AND JESUS AS SENT BY GOD. THEY REJECTED THE SAVIOR BECAUSE THEY VALUED THEIR POSITIONS MORE HIGHLY THAN THEIR SALVATION.**

**THE HOLY SPIRIT, BY HAVING MARK RECORD THEIR QUESTIONS AND THAT OF CHRIST, FACES US WITH THESE QUESTIONS ALSO. WHAT IS OUR ANSWER? MAY IT BE THE ANSWER PETER GAVE, "YOU ARE THE CHRIST."**

**AT THE TEMPLE HE ALSO SPOKE TO VARIOUS GROUPS OF PEOPLE AND TO INDIVIDUALS ON A NUMBER OF TOPICS. HE ALSO**

OBSERVED THE GIFT OF A WIDOW. AS JESUS WAS LEAVING THE TEMPLE FOR THE LAST TIME, HE WARNED HIS DISCIPLES ABOUT HOW THIS BEAUTIFUL BUILDING WOULD BE TOTALLY DESTROYED AND HOW THIS DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE AT JERUSALEM WAS A PICTURE OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WHOLE WORLD ON THE LAST DAY.

INCLUDED IN THESE WORDS OF JESUS CONCERNING THE END OF THE WORLD IS THE WARNING FOUND IN OUR TEXT: V. 33—“*BE ON GUARD! KEEP AWAKE! YOU DO NOT KNOW WHEN THE TIME WILL COME.*”

THE ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION TRANSLATES THE GREEK WITH THE WORDS “BE ON GUARD!” IT IS A COMMAND FROM JESUS AND IS FOLLOWED BY ANOTHER COMMAND TRANSLATED “KEEP AWAKE!” A THIRD COMMAND “PRAY,” IS INCLUDED IN SOME MANUSCRIPTS. ANY NUMBER OF SYNONYMS FIT THE COMMANDS, WHICH CALL FOR CHRIST’S FOLLOWERS TO TAKE CARE, TO BE AWAKE, TO KEEP THEIR EYES OPEN.

THE REASON FOR THIS WATCHFUL ATTITUDE IS GIVEN. THE SPECIFIC TIME, THE END-TIME WHICH JESUS HAS BEEN TALKING ABOUT IN THIS ENTIRE CHAPTER RELATING TO HIS SECOND COMING, IS UNKNOWN. THE UNCERTAINTY CONNECTED WITH THIS LACK OF KNOWLEDGE IS NO REASON FOR CARELESSNESS OR INDIFFERENCE. THE VERY OPPOSITE IS TRUE. UNCERTAINTY CALLS FOR INCREASED WATCHFULNESS, AS JESUS ILLUSTRATES IN THE FOLLOWING VERSE:

*V. 34—IT IS LIKE A MAN GOING ON A JOURNEY, WHEN HE LEAVES HOME AND PUTS HIS SERVANTS IN CHARGE, EACH WITH HIS WORK, AND COMMANDS THE DOORKEEPER TO STAY AWAKE.*

THE COMPARISON PRESENTED HERE BY JESUS IS OF A MAN WHO IS ABSENT FROM HIS HOME FOR A TIME, AS A MAN AWAY ON BUSINESS OR AN ABSENTEE LANDLORD. AT THE TIME OF HIS DEPARTURE HE GIVES INSTRUCTIONS TO HIS SERVANTS TO CONDUCT HIS HOUSEHOLD AND MANAGE HIS AFFAIRS WHILE HE IS ABSENT.

EACH OF THE SERVANTS HAS AN ASSIGNED TASK. ESPECIALLY THE DOORKEEPER IS TO KEEP WATCH, SO THAT HE CAN ALERT THE OTHERS WHEN THE MASTER MAKES HIS RETURN AND ALSO ADMIT THE MASTER WHEN HE ARRIVES.

THE APPLICATION OF THIS PICTURE IS FOUND IN SCRIPTURE ITSELF. THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE IS JESUS. HIS SERVANTS ARE HIS FOLLOWERS. THE LEAVE-TAKING OF THE MASTER REFERS TO JESUS' ASCENSION INTO HEAVEN. THE TASK ASSIGNED TO THE SERVANTS REFERS TO THE MANY DIRECTIVES GIVEN BY JESUS TO HIS CHURCH PRIOR TO HIS ASCENSION—TO USE HIS MEANS OF GRACE WISELY, TO LIVE AS CHILDREN OF A HEAVENLY FATHER, TO SPREAD HIS GOSPEL AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY. ESPECIALLY THE WATCHMEN OF THE CHURCH ARE TO WARN CHRISTIANS TO BE EVER ON THE ALERT AND PRAYERFUL, READY TO RECEIVE THE LORD AT HIS SECOND COMING, WHENEVER THAT MAY BE.

WORTHY OF NOTE IN THIS VERSE IS THE FACT THAT EACH SERVANT IS GIVEN A SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT WHILE AWAITING THE LORD'S RETURN. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS AN INACTIVE FOLLOWER OF CHRIST, OR TO US ANOTHER COMPARISON, A DEAD MEMBER OF HIS BODY. CHRISTIAN DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES VARY. GIFTS DIFFER AS WELL, SOME CAN SING, SOME CAN PREACH, SOME CAN VISIT OTHERS, SOME CAN BE MISSIONARIES, AND SOME CAN JUST LISTEN INTENTLY. BUT SCRIPTURE REPEATEDLY POINTS OUT THAT EACH MEMBER IS TO FUNCTION ACCORDING TO HIS OR HER STATION IN LIFE TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND TO THE WELFARE OF OTHERS—WHETHER THAT BE AS A FATHER, MOTHER, SON, DAUGHTER, CHILD OR SENIOR CITIZEN, EXECUTIVE OR BLUE-COLLAR WORKER, TEACHER OR STUDENT.

EVEN THOSE WHO ARE SEEMINGLY HELPLESS AND DEPENDENT ON OTHERS CAN BY CHRISTIAN PATIENCE AND FORBEARANCE SET A POWERFUL EXAMPLE OF FAITH TO OTHERS. THE APPLICATION IS

**SIMPLE AND STRAIGHTFORWARD, BUT IT OFFERS AN IMPORTANT REMINDER TO BELIEVERS WHO FEEL USELESS, UNIMPORTANT, LOST IN THE SHUFFLE OF HUMANITY, AND GROW INDIFFERENT TO THEIR CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITIES.**

**THOSE WHO ARE TO SERVE AS THE LORD'S WATCHMEN ARE REMINDED TO KEEP THEIR PEOPLE ALIVE, AWAKE, CONSTANTLY READY FOR CHRIST'S RETURN. HERE LIES THE SPECIAL ADVENT EMPHASIS OF THIS MESSAGE. CHRIST JESUS, WHO ONCE CAME TO SAVE ALL HUMANITY, WHO COMES TO US EVEN NOW IN WORD AND SACRAMENT, IS MOST CERTAINLY COMING AGAIN. WE DO NOT KNOW WHEN THAT WILL BE. IT COULD BE AT ANYTIME. THE SINFUL WORLD, WHICH GOES ON ITS OUTWARDLY MERRY, BUT PURPOSELESS WAY, IS TOTALLY OBLIVIOUS TO THIS FACT. CHRISTIANS CAN SO EASILY BE LULLED INTO FOLLOWING A SIMILARLY AIMLESS COURSE. IF THE LEADERS OF THE CHURCH DO NOT ALERT THEIR PEOPLE TO THIS ADVENT CALL, WHO WILL?**

**WATCHMAN, TELL US OF THE NIGHT,  
WHAT ITS SIGNS OF PROMISE ARE. (TLH 71:1)**

**THE WATCHMEN OF THE CHURCH, HOWEVER, DO NOT ONLY PROCLAIM DOOM AND DESTRUCTION. THEIRS IS ALSO A MESSAGE OF PROMISE, OF FINAL DELIVERANCE FROM SIN AND DEATH. THE LORD WHO IS COMING AGAIN IS OUR SAVIOR! THE TEXT CONTINUES IN THIS TONE:**

***VV. 35,36—THEREFORE STAY AWAKE—FOR YOU DO NOT KNOW WHEN THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE WILL COME, IN THE EVENING, OR AT MIDNIGHT, OR WHEN THE COCK CROWS, OR IN THE MORNING—LEST HE COME SUDDENLY AND FIND YOU ASLEEP.***

**ACCORDING TO CHRIST'S PICTURE THE DOORKEEPER IS TO BE ON THE ALERT SO THAT HE CAN KEEP THE SERVANTS OF THE HOUSE WATCHFUL. THE POINT IS THAT ALL ARE TO BE ON THE ALERT, AND THE WATCHING IS TO BE CONTINUOUS. THIS IS A COMMAND THAT**

**BEGAN WHEN JESUS SAID IT TO HIS DISCIPLES AND CONTINUES TODAY WITH US AND FOREVERMORE.**

**OF SPECIAL INTEREST IN THIS ILLUSTRATION ARE THE FOUR NIGHTTIME DESIGNATIONS: IN THE EVENING, AT MIDNIGHT, WHEN THE COCK CROWS, IN THE MORNING. THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE WILL ARRIVE SOMETIME DURING THE HOURS OF THE NIGHT, AT A TIME LEAST EXPECTED, WHEN PEOPLE ARE MOST LIKELY TO BE ASLEEP.**

**HENCE THE DIRECT, PERSONAL APPLICATION: “DO NOT LET HIM FIND YOU SLEEPING.” DOES THAT APPLY TO THOSE OF US THAT TEND TO FALL ASLEEP DURING THE SERMONS? OF COURSE NOT, YOU ARE STILL LISTENING—I HOPE, BUT BECAUSE WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR SOULS’ ETERNAL WELFARE “BE ALERT!”**

**HUMAN NATURE LIKES TO POSTPONE, TO PUT THINGS OFF, UNTIL THE MORROW. CHRISTIANS, TOO, HAVE THIS NATURE VERY MUCH WITHIN THEM, WHICH TELLS THEM: “MAYBE TOMORROW I’LL HAVE MORE TIME TO THINK ABOUT MY CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITIES,” OR “PERHAPS NEXT YEAR I’LL BE ABLE TO DEVOTE MORE THOUGHT TO SPIRITUAL MATTERS.” THE ADVENT MESSAGE PUTS ITS EMPHASIS ON THE “NOW,” THE “TODAY.” TOMORROW OR NEXT YEAR MAY BE TOO LATE, FOR TOMORROW MAY NEVER COME. TOMORROW IS PROMISED TO NO ONE, SO DO IT “NOW!”**

**THE LORD’S CLOSING ADMONITION OF THIS ADVENT MESSAGE:  
*V. 37—AND WHAT I SAY TO YOU I SAY TO ALL: STAY AWAKE.”***

**THE PRESENT COMMAND CLOSES THIS TEXT WITH A DIRECT, PERSONAL, STIRRING APPEAL TO EVERY CHRISTIAN: “WATCH! BE AWAKE! KEEP ON THE ALERT!”**

**WHEN WE UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION WHICH CONFRONTED THE TWELVE DISCIPLES AT THIS MOMENT, WE CAN APPRECIATE THE LORD’S PERSONAL CONCERN THAT THEY BE ESPECIALLY ALERT. IN SHORT ORDER THE LORD WAS TO BE ANOINTED BY THE MARY OF**

**BETHANY FOR HIS DEATH AND BURIAL; HE WAS TO INSTITUTE HIS HOLY SUPPER; HE WAS TO BE ARRESTED, TRIED, CONDEMNED, CRUCIFIED, AND BURIED; HE WAS TO RISE TRIUMPHANTLY ON THE THIRD DAY; HE WAS TO COMMISSION HIS DISCIPLES TO PREACH THE GOOD NEWS TO ALL CREATION; HE WAS TO ASCEND INTO HEAVEN. EACH EVENT FIT INTO THE MASTER PLAN FOR THE SALVATION OF THE WORLD, AND ALL WAS TO TAKE PLACE IN THE LIGHT OF HIS SECOND COMING, WHEN ALL THE PIECES WOULD FINALLY FIT TOGETHER FOR ALL ETERNITY!**

**TO LIVE IN THIS SPIRIT OF ANTICIPATION, TO SEE IN GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION HIS PURPOSE FOR ALL MANKIND AND FOR ONESELF— THAT IS TO LIVE AS AN ADVENT CHRISTIAN.**

**THE PEACE WHICH SURPASSES ALL HUMAN UNDERSTANDING GUARDS YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS IN CHRIST JESUS. AMEN**

*SOLI DEO GLORIA*

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