



Watchman, What of the Night?

A sermon preached by George Müller

"The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh and also the night: if ye will inquire, inquire ye: return, come, " - *Isa.* xxi. 11, 12.

The question contained in this passage is asked at a time of heavy trial, heavy judgment, which is spoken of under the figure of the "night." These judgments were coming upon Edom; for this I understand to be the country referred to, from its connection here with "Seir."

The earnestness of the inquiry is brought before us by its being *twice* asked.

Who the watchman is, there can be no difficulty in determining - evidently the prophet; because just as a watchman is set for the very purpose of announcing the approach of the enemy or of any danger, so that those who are in danger may take warning, and prepare against that which threatens, so the spiritual watchman, the prophet, was appointed to give warning of coming judgments, and to announce to the people how they should act, how they should obey and please Jehovah, so that the terrible judgments that were threatened might be averted.

The question here asked is, "When shall these terrible judgments come to an end?" In New Testament language, "When will this dispensation end? When shall our sorrows cease, and we be for ever with the Lord?" Now, observe particularly the answer of the watchman. He does not say, "It is the second or third watch of the night " - not to mention the fourth watch, which could not have been referred to by one who lived at the time when this prophecy was uttered, because the division of the night into four watches was introduced by the Romans; but I say, the watchman does not answer, "It is the second watch," or "It is the third watch." Ah! how deeply important it is to notice this. Again and again it has been the inquiry amongst Christians: "How far are we from the close of the present dispensation? How near is the return of the Lord?" And repeatedly calculations have been made with the view of fixing the precise date, or nearly so, of the fulfilment of the prophetic predictions; and this political event or that religious movement has been taken as an indication of the speedy approach of the end; and statements have been made, "So many years, or months, or days, will elapse, and then the dispensation will close." Now, how, beloved, are we to decide when we hear such statements? I judge we should be guided by the answer of the watchman, "The morning cometh, and also the night." Nothing was declared concerning the *time*.

May I be allowed here to say one word from my own experience to my younger brethren? It was in July, 1829, just forty-three years and three months ago, that it pleased the Lord to show me the truth of His word as to His second coming, and the truths connected with that blessed hope. At that time there was war between the Ottoman Empire and Russia; and many good, excellent Christians said, "Now is come the time that the Euphrates shall be dried up;" "now the Ottoman Empire will be destroyed, and Israel will be restored," and so on; and I, as a young disciple, very

naturally took up the views and repeated the words of my elder brethren. Well, what followed? Before six weeks were over peace was proclaimed, the Ottoman Empire remained, and remains to this day, and Israel is still not restored to their land. Now, I firmly believe that Israel *will* be restored to their land; but I refer to this mistake of my earlier years to illustrate the point I am referring to.

Not that we should never look at political events in connection with the prophetic Word, but that we should use the greatest caution before we conclude that such and such events must surely usher in the end. I judge that when the time really comes that we should be guided by such events, the signs will be so plain, so decided, that *all* who love Jesus will be able to see that *now* truly He is at the door. But *before* this time comes, until these things come to pass, let us be cautious how we make such statements as, "In so many days or so many months, or before this generation passes, such and such events will happen;" but rather let us say with the watchman, "The morning cometh, and also the night;" that is to say, the great, the all-important point is, the *certainty* of our Lord's return: "This same Jesus *shall* so come in like manner" as He went into heaven. There is no question whatever that when all is made ready for the *bride*, the Bridegroom will return and receive her to Himself; and what we have to do, is to comfort ourselves with the hope that our Lord will surely come again; and in the full assurance of this, that there is coming the day of the manifestation of the sons of God, we should patiently bear the cross. We should comfort ourselves with the certainty that "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry;" and if He tarry yet a little longer, to say still, He will surely come, and lay out ourselves to win souls for Christ, remembering that it is in longsuffering to the perishing that He tarries.

Some may say, "Why make so much of the coming of the Lord? Is not death the same thing, for it is our going to Him? I once thought so myself; but I was led to see that there is a vast difference between the two. The hope of the Church is not death, but the return of the Lord. If I am taken out of the world by death, I shall myself be happy so far as regards the soul; but, blessed as I shall be, my happiness, even as regards myself alone, will not be full; for I shall not yet have my glorified body, my redeemed body. But when the Lord comes, it is the whole *family* brought into happiness and blessedness - the whole family gathered *home*. Then there will be the resurrection of the just, the *first* resurrection, when, therefore, the *whole* elect family will receive their glorified bodies. *Death* has to do with the *partial* happiness of individual believers; but the coming of the Lord has to do with the *complete* happiness of the *whole* redeemed family! So you see there is a vast difference between the two events as to the *hope* connected with them; and we must not yield to the statements that are made to the contrary. We must be guided by the Word of God, and not frame *our own* notions about these things, nor follow the notions of good people around us, if their thoughts are not according to the Word of God.

"The *morning* cometh;" that is, the morning of that day which will be without clouds, of that day which will never end, in which the whole heavenly family will share together eternal happiness.

But this is not all. The "*night*" cometh also. Ah! *then* it will be seen who are on the Lord's side, and who are not. What a revelation will there be then. The curtain lifted, and the actual condition of all manifested! The bodies of the believers who sleep in Jesus, though by millions scattered over all parts of the world, all raised and gathered together to their Lord; but the bodies of unbelievers, that lie in the grave, will be left in the grave to await the resurrection of the last day! The unbelievers who are *alive*, separated for ever from the

believers - the one taken, and the other left! Oh, think of it! for the solemn point for each is this - To which class do I belong? If ever there was a practical truth, *this* is it. Let us look at it again and again, and ask ourselves before God, "will it be to me the *morning*, or will it be to me the *night*? The eternal day of happiness, or the eternal night of woe and misery?" The night! Oh, what a night! The night of "wailing and gnashing of teeth," the night to be spent for ever with the "devil and his angels"! Oh, my beloved friends and fellow-sinners, ask, I beseech you, before God, the question, "Am I prepared? Am I really trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of my soul?" There must be the *entire* dependence upon the Lord Jesus; no ritualism, no works will avail. The precious blood of Christ must be the sole ground of your trust before God. I repeat it, the momentous question is, "Am I trusting in Jesus, depending on Jesus alone for the salvation of my soul?" If so, the morning of that bright, blessed day is before me; if not, there is nothing before me but the endless night of darkness!

In conclusion, one word on the last clause of the verse – "If ye will inquire, inquire ye; return, come." Our esteemed brethren have regarded these as addressed to the backslider and to the undecided, and I believe rightly so; but I would particularly dwell for a moment on these words, as showing to us the heart of God: These words were written by inspiration and it is therefore, just as if God were saying in our midst this evening, "If there be here the vilest, the oldest, the most hardened sinner, I desire not that that sinner should die. Oh, if he will only *return*, if he will only be in earnest, how gladly will I receive him!"

And then, if there should be any who are in some little measure stirred up to "inquire after God," His word to such is, "Inquire ye;" that is, *continue* to read the word of God. Have you a little desire, a little relish, for that Word? Be encouraged; that desire is the Spirit's working; it comes from God, not from your own evil heart. Continue to look to the Lord, and the blessing will yet be yours.

This word is not to be *limited to backsliders*, but is to be taken more generally; for by nature it is true of us *all*, that we have cast God behind our back; and what we want is to "return," to "come" back to Him. Now to "come" to God means to "believe." This is the inspired explanation of what "coming" means, as we learn from comparing John vi. 64, 65, with verse 44 of the same chapter. This, then, is what the sinner has to do - to *believe* in Jesus, to trust in Him, to depend on Him for salvation. In this consists "coming" to God, and no one who has not *believed* can be said to have "come."

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Registered Office: Müller House, 7 Cotham Park, Bristol BS6 6DA
Tel: 0117 924 5001 Email: admin@mullers.org