

The Task of the Watchman

By Dave Butts

“I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth” (Isaiah 62:6-7).

“Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak” (Matthew 26:40-41).

A Watchman's Story

The young watchman stood silently at his post on the wall. The cool Judean night caused an involuntary shiver. It had been a quiet evening...a few latecomers were allowed through the pedestrian gate, but nothing else. It was almost time for his shift to end when his eyes caught a glimpse of something glowing over the nearest hill to the north. Peering into the darkness confirmed that something was amiss not too far from the city. It could be a movement of enemy troops with their torches betraying their position. Of course, it could just be the campfire of travelers...but why now in the middle of the night?

Whatever it was, the young watchman's orders were clear...he was to sound the alarm. Raising the trumpet to his lips, he sounded the three short blasts that would bring his superiors to the wall. Within minutes, the quiet sentry post was filled with soldiers. An armed scouting party was sent to the general area of the fire. The glow from beyond the hill died down and soon the soldiers returned. A shepherd's hut had caught fire when a gust of wind blown across the sleeping shepherd's coals had ignited the thatch.

Though the fire was not a danger to the city, the watchman was commended by his commanding officer for his sharp eyes. It could easily have been a threat that would have been stopped by the watchful eyes of the young man. This was the very reason why the watchmen were in place.

Watchmen of Today

There is a movement of prayer taking place all over the planet that is firmly rooted in Scripture. It is the call of God to His people to take their places on the wall as watchmen. Whether we look to the Old Testament or New, we find that God is calling us to watch and pray.

Our modern culture does not readily identify with the ancient concept of watchmen on the walls. To accept the Lord's call to this great movement of prayer then, we will need to train ourselves in what it means to be a part of this great company of the “alert.” The Isaiah 62 passage, quoted above, helps us greatly in this task.

It is clear that the job of a watchman is a continual commitment. It is not sporadic or dependent upon our feelings. Because of the life or death nature and constancy of the watchman's task, it is an assignment for the many, not just the one. Believers working in tandem, sharing shifts of prayer, will be the most effective. Isaiah 62:6-7 describes an intensity that must be shared...day and night...never silent...give yourself no rest. Only groups of committed believers who band together in watchful prayer will be able to stay at their post.

Notice also in Scripture that it is God who posts the watchmen. This is a divine assignment, not just the latest prayer fad. To stand on the wall as a watchman, stationed there by the Lord Himself, is a great privilege. We need to receive and obey such a call with gratitude and humility.

Perhaps the overwhelming characteristic of watchman prayer is that it is to be done with open eyes. This does not necessarily imply physical eyes, although it certainly can, but our spiritual eyes must be held wide open. We are to watch and pray.

What is it we are looking for as we pray? I would suggest that we first look for an enemy attack. Certainly in Old

Testament times, this sort of defensive watchfulness was at the heart of the task. The watchman on the wall was always on the alert for any attempt of an enemy to attack or infiltrate the city. Too many times, the walls of the Church and of our cities today are open to attack because of a lack of watchfulness. In 2 Corinthians 2:11, Paul wrote that we are "not unaware" of the schemes of the enemy. Unless praying watchmen are on duty, we too often find ourselves painfully unaware of the attempts of the enemy to disrupt and destroy.

On the opposite end of matters, I believe that the watchmen are also to keep their eyes open to see and discern moves of God. All too often we miss out on what God is doing because we are not paying attention. The watcher should always be asking, "Lord, what are You doing in our church or city this day? Is there something You are calling you people to do in cooperation with what You are doing?" How much more effective we would be if, instead of starting our own projects for God, we found ourselves moving alongside a current move of God!

The other area for watchfulness is discerning the needs of the people of God. A watchman on the wall in the Old Testament would often see human needs and be able to send someone to meet those needs. Is there someone among you who is prayerfully watching the people of God to see who is hurting or who is in need? We often talk about shepherding the flock of God. What greater way to shepherd than to continually watch in prayer over the sheep the Lord loves?

What will be the results of watchmen prayers? According to Isaiah, we will see the firm establishment of the Kingdom of God. The prophet speaks of the establishment of Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God among His people. In both Old and New Covenant, Jerusalem represents God among man. Jesus' main message was the coming kingdom, present in Him. Emmanuel...God with us!

Another result of this powerful prayer movement will be that the glory of God will be seen among the nations. In the Matthew passage above, Jesus wanted the disciples to watch with him and to pray for Him. How do we do that today? Have you ever asked the question, "Lord, how can I pray for You today?" I decided to try that in my own prayer life. I started praying for Him...feeling pretty inadequate and a bit foolish. I began to bless Him, agreeing with many passages in the Psalms to "bless the Lord." As I continued to do that it began to emerge as prayer for His glory to be seen on the planet that has rejected Him. I began to sense that I was now praying for and about something that was close to His heart. As we watch and pray, we find ourselves lining up with the prophet Habakkuk and crying out "for the glory of God to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14). Prayer warriors, it is time to ascend the wall of your city and begin to fulfill your calling as a watchman of God.

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