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Sermon preached by Mr. G.J. Collier of Linslade at the Anniversary
Services at Jireh Chapel, Tenberden, on 17th May, 1978

I would, this evening, draw your thoughts to a word found in the 21st chapter of Isaiah and the latter part of the 11th verse:

"Watchman, what of the night?"

The whole verse reads thus: "The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?"

The illustration that we have in this portion of the Word of God is highly significant and indicative of a great deal that the Lord brings before His own people. The illustration is that of a city; the safety and the protection of that city in the hands of a watchman. The question that is asked of this watchman is, first of all, from the one who set him in the office "He calleth to me out of Seir. Watchman, what of the night?"

But there doubtless is also many an enquiry, or an enquiring heart and mind, in the dark seasons, which language would be the same "Watchman, what of the night?"

Now I want to gather, as we can, a little of the important teaching here, and first of all consider the illustration - that of a city. It is a striking fact in the Scriptures how much the Lord makes in His word, and how much teaching there is in connection with cities. All the way through the whole Word of God there are important things, principles and teachings regarding cities.

We go right back to the beginning, and we find that the first city that was made, was made by Cain, and he called that city that he built 'Enoch' (Gen.4.17) The word means 'dedicated', But it was not only a sad city, it was a sad builder too, one whose service and sacrifice was not accepted by the Lord his God. But the first reference to a city in the Scriptures is rather significant. It was by that man Cain, calling the city dedicated. And there are a great many people since his day that will call their works 'dedications to God', and regard them as the epitome of truth, something that God ought to regard and acknowledge, but which God rejects.

Now the second city we find in the Word of God was built after the flood, and the men of that time came together and said let us build a city and a tower - a tower that would reach even unto heaven - and they called the name of that city which they built 'Bab - el', with a hyphen in it, which meant that it was the way to God, or the gate of God. And we know how God dealt with that city. He came and looked at the builders and at their building, and He confounded them, and the name of the place thereafter was 'Babel', which means confusion. Very striking significance there! - that just the hyphen in that word changed the whole nature of the word from being the gate of God to being confusion.

Now these things are important and significant, because they show to us what has been going on throughout the whole course of history. Man has been building something of his own and calling it a work of dedication, and imagining, because they so call it by that name, that it is a work that is acceptable to God. And again another thing is this, that man has always been attempting to find a new way to God. All down the whole history of mankind the attempts have been made again and again to make and to build a new way to God.

I would at this point very tenderly lay emphasis upon this for the benefit of our younger people. You need to be wary of those things that are common today, which pretend and profess to be new ways, new ideas, new things, so different from the old, the old fashioned way that the people of God have travelled along so long. They say they want something new today, and here and there on almost every side you can hear

people with this kind of language, we want to find a new way to God. Remember, my dear young people, what God did with the first attempts that man made to find a new way. There is no new way to God, there is only that way which God has appointed and ordained before time began. A way through a precious Jesus, through the rent veil of His own flesh and blood; a way which is a way of righteousness; a way the fathers have trod; a way all God's pilgrim people have found entrance into the eternal kingdom of heaven. And there is no other way, however man may devise, and however he may invent. There is no other way to God.

Then we come further in the Scriptures, and we find a very glorious and wonderful reference to a city, a city which is called Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. John saw it coming down from God out of heaven, and God speaks of this city in a multitude of ways in His holy Word. It is a glorious city! The foundations of it are sure, the bulwarks of it are unbreakable, the beauties and glories and the palaces thereof are delight and splendour. And God says: "Go round about her, mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, for this God, her God, is our God and will be our guide for ever" (Ps. 48. 12/14). And again in the psalms he says: "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of our God. God is in the midst of her" (Ps. 46.4/5). She has not only been built around with bulwarks, impregnable, but she has been indwelt by the King, the King of King and Lord of Lords. And if you and I are members of that city, and are inhabitants of that city, we shall be thankful for the watchmen. We shall be thankful to the Lord for placing faithful watchmen in the city and on the walls of the city. But what a wonderful mercy if we are members. Members we would be, now and in eternity.

Perhaps there may be some here this evening who are gravely concerned as to whether they belong to the people of God; whether they have the same marks; whether they are numbered among the people, like the good Countess of Huntington when she said:

I love to meet among them now,
Before thy gracious feet to bow,
Though vilest of them all;
But can I bear the piercing thought:
What if my name should be left out,
When thou for them shalt call? (Gadsbys 938)

O blessed city! - The city of God.

And then there is the heavenly city, of whom it is said about Abraham: "Abraham looked for a city whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11.10).

So you see in the Scriptures you have the whole range. You have the worst, and the best. You have the constructions of man, that must come to nothing, and you have the building of God that is eternal in the heavens.

But now our text is concerning this city, this particular city, and I want to try and bring things to you tonight in consideration of it. The word here indicates something that is of great importance, and that is the safety of the city, safety on earth! The illustration is of a city walled around, and where the inhabitants may find rest and peace and safety. The first thing that we must say tonight in respect of this matter is this, that the only One who can really keep the city, any city, is the Lord himself: "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain". (Ps. 127.1). The keeping of God's cities, if we look at it in the light of being the Church of God, or churches in particular; these cities are not kept by watchmen, but

they may have some most faithful watchmen, who never, never neglect anything that is required of them; but even so the safety of that city is not dependent on the watchmen. Instrumentally they are very valuable, but the safety of every city is in the hands of God. We ought ever to remember this! This is an anniversary day. I am sure there are those here who are abundantly thankful that they are kept, this Cause of God is kept free from the ravages that the enemy might cause, or roots of bitterness might spring up from the very heart of the place and cause great distress and division. And I am sure of this, that if there are those who do value the continuity and the maintenance of a Cause of God, I am sure you recognize that the Lord alone is responsible. It is His grace, His power and His goodness that keeps the feet from falling. The disintegration of any church is preserved by the power and presence of the Lord God.

Now, having said that, our text is a word addressed to the watchmen "Watchman, what of the night?" You see, let us keep to the figure, it is of this servant of the city, whose appointment is a very grave and important appointment. It is no place for a novice to be appointed as a watchman of a city. He must be one that is qualified, and shows by various practices and ways his qualification to be a watchman. No novice, therefore, would be a suitable applicant for a post of this kind. A great deal may well depend on him. The safety of the sleeping city may be in his hands, as an instrument, and that means that the inhabitants, the citizens are confident in their watchman as to his faithfulness and his alertness, so they can rest in their beds and feel at peace and of safety. So, therefore, one of the great qualifications is the suitability of the watchman for the undertaking that he undertakes.

And then another thing, he must be a man devoted to his duties. No watchman should at any time neglect his duty. He may well be from time to time out of sight in the dark night seasons. No one can keep a constant eye upon him, but he must be a man devoted to his duties. I remember knowing of a case where one of the mates on board a merchant vessel was known to be self-indulgent at the times of his watch, and, rather than face the rigours of a night on the bridge, he would take his time off when it was convenient and get down below where it was warm and comfortable, and let the vessel go without a watchman. And this practice continued until some of his fellow-travellers were uneasy, and they decided among themselves that they would leave the ship at the first opportunity, and they did, and a new crew had to be found. It was not very long afterwards that the ship foundered and was lost. No one can say for sure, but it seemed almost certain that it was through that unfaithful watchman that the ship was lost.

He must, therefore, be dedicated to his labour and his work. He must also be alert and intent upon his observation. He must see, he must become acquainted, and he is acquainted, with the night conditions. If I am taking this now in respect of the ministry of the dear Lord's servants, how important these things are, and how needful it is for them to be at all times watchful. And they, of all people, have to be well acquainted with the night conditions. There are a great many so-called ministers today, they only know one kind of condition; that is broad daylight. They can never deal with anything that is in the dark. They know nothing about the night seasons, and if any poor inhabitant of the city comes to them in the dark, they are totally unable to advise or counsel or comfort them in any way whatsoever.

But the true watchman must know the night conditions, that is to say, he must be well acquainted with what is in the dark, and how to find the way in the dark, and how to keep alive and alert in the dark. "Watchman, what of the night?" You see the question is not concerning the daytime, it is concerning the night. That is the most important part, because it is in the night where danger lurks. It is in the

darkness that the enemy plans to approach, seeks to overthrow and destroy. And, therefore, the watchman that is not able or capable of discerning or seeing in the dark, he leaves the city with all its inhabitants exposed to dangers of all kinds. "Watchman, what of the night?"

You see, therefore, this illustration has a great deal in it that is undoubtedly important to the Church of God. The watchman must know also the approaches of the enemy, he must be well acquainted with the most likely places from whence the enemy will come. He must never be an ignoramus, but one who has that knowledge and intelligence that forestalls and outmatches the enemy in their assaults on the city, and therefore he must be a man that is well acquainted with the use of weapons. The Apostle Paul, he says: "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (II Cor. 10.4) And indeed the watchman must not only be able to raise the alarm, but he must also be ready to fight. O, how much depends upon him. The safety of the sleeping populace depends on this watchman. "Watchman, what of the night?"

And you know it is often, and has been in the Church's history, night seasons from time to time, when darkness has pervaded, no bright shining lights have appeared on the horizon. And I verily think that the day in which we live is such a day as that. And it is at night, as we have it, is very true, it is when the night is darkest that the enemy is the most alert, and makes the most vigorous attempts to break and overthrow. And that is true, you know my friends, today in Zion with regard to the churches of God. It is a dark time, we often feel, we often speak of it, and you may depend upon it, it is a time when the enemy of God and of truth will be very active. There are such things as attempts made by the great adversary of our souls to undermine even those who do have strong confidence and faith in God. One of the ways today that it is done is by undermining the precious Word of God. There are new editions, translations. All of them are heralded in these days by someone or other as being the last word in perfection, but, mark you, my friends, they are all most vulnerable, and every one of them detracts from the glory of Christ. It does not enhance that glory; it is a deviation, a subtle yet terrible deviation, from the truth.

Now true watchmen must be wary of these attacks, and warn the city about them. "Watchman, what of the night?"

Now I want to look a little into the city tonight, just before we close, and that is to find, perhaps, one or two of the inhabitants of this city. You see that, although the chief question came from the one who had appointed the watchman, there is no doubt, as I said at the beginning, here and there in the city there can be heard a voice with this language "Watchman, what of the night?" I want us to try and find one or two of those inhabitants, and to ask, perhaps, the question why it is that they are awake, and why it is they are so concerned. There would be many kinds in the city. The majority would be fast asleep, totally unconcerned about the safety of the city or their own. Such are typical of those who take everything for granted, who are self-assured, resting in a false sense of comfort. But there would be others in the city - a small minority no doubt - who were awake. These are the people that we want to find out more about. Perhaps we may find out something about them from the answers the 'Watchman' gives.

The first is a word of hope: "The morning cometh". A blessed word of certainty suited abundantly to those anxious souls who dreaded the darkness of the night of uncertainty and distress. There would not be a stitch of comfort should the Watchman give an uncertain sound. God's servants must have a positive gospel, based upon verity and truth. "If the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle?" (I Cor. 14.8). Should there be one moment's hesitation on

the part of the Watchman, the peace of the city would vanish. Paul says: "Our word toward you was not yea and nay. For the Son of God who was preached among you was not yea and nay, but in Him was yea" (II Cor.1.18,19).

"The morning cometh". The Watchman is faithful, he adds a cautionary word "And also the night". He does not promise false peace, without trial, he knows that the brightest day will be followed by night again. The Christian Watchman tells the people that grace will be tried; there is the trial of faith. But the first message is the Morning will come, the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings"(Mal.4.2) But it is faithful to warn that there may be dark seasons ahead:

Why through darksome paths we go,
We may know no reason;
Yet we shall hereafter know,
Each in his due season. (Gadsbys 315)

This then is the first message, and what kind of character will welcome it with all their heart? I say that soul that is awake and fearful of the dark, and longs for the day. So we have found one at least who is a dweller in this city. The Watchman, being a discerning person, has detected that the trembling voice that has come to him from some dwelling in the city is anxious to enquire, but is so very fearful. He therefore throws out encouragement "If ye will enquire, enquire ye!" Let your request be made known unto God.

It would appear that there was some sign that the enquirer was in real earnest, so he comes with a bolder line, first showing the essential need that there must be a return. He knew nothing as to the distance this soul may have wandered, whether far or near, but the first necessity was for there to be repentance. He is a faithful Watchman, putting first things first. He does not say only 'Come', but 'Return, come'. What a blessed word! "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come" (Rev. 22.17). How blessed the feet of such a Watchman would be in the ears of this soul, and indeed all souls fearful and anxious to have their sins forgiven, and find an open way to heaven.

Are there any here who have experienced the wakeful anxiety of a legal night? The dreary hours of darkness seem unending. How precious a word dropped from the Lord's Watchman when the eager earnest request has gone forth: "Watchman, what of the night?"

Amen