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Sermon preached by our Pastor

on Thursday Evening

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Lesson. Isaiah 62 & 64

Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, the morning cometh, and also the night. Isaiah 21, vv. 11-12.

This Scripture is exceedingly attractive at such a time as this, and it is relevant to the present distressful circumstances and to the low estate of Zion. It has respect to the prospect, as to whether we have any expectation and the nature of the expectation, what it is and on what it is founded. I will make a brief reference to the setting of the text in Bible history. The prophet Isaiah, during the long captivity of his people in Babylon saw in the issue the overthrow of Babylon by the Meds and Persians, and when inquiry was made on the great watchman on the bastion of the wall; "Watchman, what of the night?" - it had been a long dark night over several decades - "Watchman, what of the night?" the reply was given to the question through God. It is a most beautiful, hopeful, encouraging, joyful reply, and it is a reply the language of which has rested with considerable efficacy over many years in my soul when we nationally, or in the Church of God, or personally, or as a family or friends have united together passing through this dark night. The word has been a sweet harbinger and herald of Spring and joy and deliverance.

So the watchman could give a reply with the certainty of divine inspiration and holy authority. Can you comment on it? He said; "The morning cometh." What a mild, pacific, clement, loving, gracious, merciful utterance from God! "The morning cometh, and also the night." (I only had a few minutes after coming from Shoreham so I have not been able to look into this, only it has rested on my mind.)

I feel convinced in my soul that there is a great distinction between the two nights. The first is the night of captivity, sorrow, trouble and

distress. There is another type of night. This is the night when you rest from your labours and your works follow you: when the day, the little day of life is o'er and all weariness, painfulness, sighing and tears are over. "The night cometh, when no man can work." (John 9.4) So I will try to build up the message as inspired by the Spirit in the gospel of His grace this evening.

The first point to be concentrated on is night. "Watchman, what of the night?" I want to show several definitions of night. What is night on this planet? It is one of the laws of Creation and a highly beneficial one too. It is one of the marvellous provisions of God for the whole human race,- the wonderful season of night suitable to the complete resting of every part of the anatomy. I am bound to say that after centuries of study the medical profession cannot explain sleep. It is one of the miracles God has given. A human being, one moment alert and conscious and the next asleep. This cannot be adequately defined. I was thinking of the wonderful nights Adam and Eve had before the vile intruder entered the paradise of Eden; nights of peace and rest, joyful nights; no fear, no anxiety for the body, no onslaughts by Satan, not plagued or distressed in any way; no sin to distress them; no adversary, no pain, no trouble. They must have been marvellous nights in paradise before the fall. You can just contemplate it. Then the fall of man, the entrance of sin into the world and death through sin, and the result,- the curse of God for sin and in a certain sense, the descent or enveloping of this planet and the human race in the perpetual night of darkness, misery, sorrow, pain, agony and distress. What a night descended on the human race when Adam fell! A night where there was fear, trouble, sorrow, misery, ruin, death; all the effects of the curse of God. What an amazing thing that the inspired writer of the first Book, Genesis, Moses was favoured to give a record of how (we do not know exactly when, but it would appear it was almost immediately after the fall) God made known His plan of salvation and gave an indication that there would be a morning. Remarkable, is it not? When the curse was pronounced on the man and the woman, the serpent and the earth for man's sake the Lord gave an amazing inkling that there would one day be ushered in a morning. The seed of the

woman should bruise the serpent's head, "and thou shalt bruise his heel." This seed would bruise Satan's power: there would be a morning.

This is very beautiful, and all through the Scriptures of the Old Testament you see the morning heralded, prophesied, and you see men and women living in the fear of God anticipating the morning, and knowing to some extent a morning in their souls. I mention the case referred to recently of the dear woman. Her husband was so fearful, he said; "We shall surely die." His wife said; "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have showed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these." (Judg. 13.22-23) So Manoah's wife had already experienced in her soul a morning. There was a light shining in her spirit, She knew something of glory in the anticipation of the Advent, and she knew something of a personal Advent to her soul. "We shall not die; there is a morning." We see this all through. In the Psalms David was sinking low and he referred to the morning. "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that ~~wait~~<sup>watch</sup> for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning."\* (Psa. 130. 5-6)\* "Let Israel hope in the Lord."\*

Take for instance, Psalm 42. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him for the help of his countenance." There will be a sunrising; His countenance. So wonderful is this expectation of a morning! day, dawn. And there is a word in prophecy concerning this; "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it;" What for? The birth of Christ: that was the vision. And as we have had recently in Isaiah; "Then said I, Lord, how long?" There was an expectation of a morning.

Before I take a further step let us together examine this point. We were in the dark night of death, alienation, bondage, ignorance, ruin, in a state of unregeneracy once. What a night! Have we known the morning? Did there come into your experience a morning? If we translate, we could say of course, immediately divine life is imparted to the soul it is morning,

but it is not recognised because you have come under a sense of your sinnership, pain and condemnation that is in itself a night to you. But there has been a dawn; there is divine life in your soul, showing to you your darkness. So let us come to the focal point. Has there been a morning in your soul? What morning? When the Sun of righteousness arose with healing in His wings: morning. No saint of God can ever describe the unparalleled joy of the first morning; when for the first time in your life you experienced the inexpressible joy of realising you were a child of God. God loves you and His love was flowing into your soul and you ~~had~~ loved Him. O the inexpressible wonder of rising in the morning and going to your work, and with the sweet, blissful hope that you were and are an heir of God and joint-heir with Christ.

That is the morning I want to name. It came, didn't it?— to know with divine witness you possess a living hope, your anchor is well cast within the veil and heaven is your home. Not all receive the assurance immediately but there is a blessed hope and you feel the joys of an eternal Spring in your soul, and you have a divine treasure of more value than the world. O the wonder of being able for the first time to join the multitude of the heavenly host in praising God! This is sweet to me because, do you see? it means having this blessed morning and knowing Christ is your Saviour you can say;

"If my hope on Christ is stayed,  
Let Him come when He thinks best." (698)

Whenever He thinks best it is well. What a morning!

I propose briefly to go back to night. What is the period of night? If we use simple language it is the period between sunset and sunrise; when the sun is not shining on this part of the globe and so we have our night. In the Scriptures often night stands for sombre things,— darkness, death, servile fear, temptation, misery, sorrow and felt destitution of the Lord's presence. It stands for sin and all that is so distressing to the soul. Night. When we think of darkness of ~~our~~ sin, temptation, the pit, awful doubts and fears, terrible temptations and trials that are overwhelming,— we are not unconscious of this, are we? Even now you know

what it is to have a dark night in reference to your experience. If any x said to you (a close friend, one you could really speak to and confide in "Well, bröther,- or sister,- how is it with you?" there are times when you would say; "I\_t is a dark night to me. There are so many dark things. I feel to be in the dark spiritually, tormented by Satan, fears and doubts and dark troubles." There are dark troubles you have no light on yet. There is no moon or stars yet. I know what it is. You step out into trouble in less than five minutes and the darkness deepens; there is no light shines through; no sign of deliverance and you do not entertain hope of deliverance. There is no light shines from this blessed Book or for you to feel there is love in it. You cannot see the rainbow.

One or two things here concerning nights. There are varying degrees of darkness. There are beautiful clear nights when you see the moon, and nights when you see the star-spangled firmament and the brightest stars. So it is with the people of God. There are nights when you see the moon give her light which is derived from the sun and is a symbol of the Church of God. A light shines from the Church to your soul and path. This is derived from Christ; it is the provision of God. There are also stars; the bright and morning star. If this shines into your soul in the night you are ready for the morning. O the wonder of it! You have to pass through the night to know the glory described. When the Star sparkles in your view you know there will be a morning, and ultimately a morning without clouds,- eternal day. Whatever you are passing through the Lord will appear although you do not see how.

I am aware of the wonder of the stars in God's right hand,- God's ministers; and a light derived from Christ shines in the gospel, and every child of God is a star in the firmament. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matt.5.16) So think of night and of this light. How is it with you now? What of the morning?

It was required of the watchman over the people of God and over the nation, watching for the Lord's appearing, and the one who warned them concerning dangers, that he should pronounce a divine edict concerning the night. "Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning

cometh." So I will devote myself to two holy doctrines; the doctrine of the incarnation and of the glorious resurrection of our blessed Redeemer. When He was born, as the glory of the Lord shone round about the shepherds watching over their flock by night, the word came from the angel, "Fear not, - because they were fearful. - for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." Let those words sink down into your spirits. "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." It is morning. What morning? The Advent of Christ. "Until the day break," - beautiful words in the Song of Solomon. - "Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of Frankincense. Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee."

This takes us to the second holy doctrine; His Passion, death, burial and resurrection. What a breaking of day there was when He rose from the dead on the third day! Christ is risen. The day cometh. Again I suggest to you that the power of Christ's resurrection has permanent prevalency over the whole election of grace. The power of His resurrection is known by the people of God in a way they appreciate and understand; many do not discern it until after. I will give you one example. Take the path so many walk. It is what I have often referred to as a much deeper path; a heavy path. There are sorrows, trials, weights, things which in themselves apart from the power of Christ's resurrection would be capable of putting you in your grave. You have known an experience when in a few hours a shock came and if the Lord did not support you by His resurrection power you would be in your grave. Then we come to chronic things where souls live and go on month in and month out, with enormous weights resting on them that are capable of putting them in their grave. What sustains you? It is the power of His resurrection bears you up. You experience it without fully recognising what it is. It is the prevalent influence of the power of Christ's resurrection. It is a measure of the same power that brought Him from the tomb that bears you through. It is heavenly, divine, very choice, and you have got to go in a deep path to know it. You will never know it in shallow waters. So the morning has come. He is risen. It is morning.

I will make application of it. Take a child of God who knows the morning because of what we are, because of this foul body of sin and death and because of the nature of this life it is like living on a battlefield with sore and bitter conflicts. O the dreadful conflict it is to live here below, whereas you often long for rest, to be for ever delivered from the constant onslaughts, difficulties, impossibilities, sorrows, burdens, fears you often walk in.

I will come to another night, and I quote. "Thou hast showed thy people hard things: thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment." This always links me with Mr Endersby of Scaynes Hill. "Thou hast showed thy people hard things: thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment." "Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh." You will have a morning, child of God. After all your pleadings, wrestling groaning, sighing, weeping which the saints know, there will be a morning for you. You will know in a moment when the Lord breaks through the cloud, It is almost three years ago I returned from Westminster. At first I was favoured; then I went into awful temptation, fear and weakness. Satan said; "You will never open your mouth again. You will never have strength and ability to stand before the congregation again." - It is not easy, even when one is well, and I was tossing and tormented. One morning in agony of soul, the Lord spoke. It was like the bright and morning Star. He said; "The darkest cloud hope pierces through." (244) I said, Blessed be God! The Lord has done it. The next point of meditation was, though I knew I had only got the strength of a babe I believe God strengthened me to go to the Prayer Meeting. I thought, if I get there I shall see. I do not know how I came. I had a hymn and a subject concerning Abraham, "who against hope believed in hope." I held on to that and the Lord came. I ventured on the Lord in fear and weakness and trembling, and I was as free as a bird let loose. "The morning cometh." It had dawned. You will know when the morning is heralded, the darkness begins to break and the Lord begins to break through with His beams. O the joy of your soul! You look over the dark valley to the Land of everlasting sunshine. "Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended. (Isa. 60.20) Amen.