

SB
82
1365 g
Lap 8/2

Sermon preached by Mr. J. K. Popham
on Sunday morning, 11th. January, 1925

Text: 1. Corinthians 16 v. 13

"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith,
quit you like men, be strong."

* * * * *

Corinth was a city noted for its wealth and commerce, - learning, - but it was proverbial for its vices. If one wished to corrupt a youth, it was said, 'do you wish to Corinthianise him?' Such was the state of the city of Corinth. And God did what is according to His nature; He chose many of that wicked city to be His own children. It is like Him, to go where wickedness is, and give grace. It is one of His wondrous ways, to choose the worst and give them the best blessings. He had many people in that city, so He sent His servant Paul to speak to them, and He made the preaching effectual. Invincible grace laid hold of this people. Do any of you think that vital religion has no justice in it - has nothing but what seems to you terribly harsh and cruel? Now look at this city, devoted to wickedness, under the rule of the god of this world. Not one of them, as far as we know, wanted God, not one of them; but He went, and He said to this and to that one, 'You are Mine,' and He snatched them as brands from out of the fire. This is God's way. What did He do with regard to some of us, when we did not want Him; had no thought of Him, neither of His justice, nor of His mercy; - what did He do? He called us; passed millions by, and laid hold of us. Is He unjust to any to whom He shows not the same mercy? No. Is He good in calling any? O unspeakably good, eternally good. And so He planted a church in that city. He may come and plant His grace in some of you. O that He might! What is like grace? What so good as the love of God? What so beautiful as the given, the imputed, righteousness of Christ? What so marvelous as the forgiveness of all sin? And God can do this. Why sinner, if this morning you are just as full of the world as you can contain, this great God has power to come and turn it out and put Himself there, and if all you think about, is getting on in this world, He can come and show you what a poor dying world this is, and what a dying creature you are, and that the only thing worth having is God in His grace, in His Son, in His mercy. This is what God does - He saves sinners. O, I am glad of that! And

we are sinners. He saves the lost. He came to do it. He came to save the lost, and we are lost. And He came to make Himself known, to become intimate and to deal as a friend with sinners, to turn them to friends; to slay their enmity, to remove their filthiness and their rags, and give them His purity and His righteousness. He came to bring them near to Himself, nearer than they were when in a poor unfallen Adam; and to deal with them in the gospel, as He never would have dealt with them in the law. O the intimacy, the familiarity, that God has with His people in the gospel of His dear Son. He planted a church in Corinth. He greatly gifted that church and graced it. He gave the church a testimony of Jesus Christ, and He showed, by Paul, His faithfulness to confirm that testimony in them, but that church was like the church to-day, - not perfect, and some in it had not been severed from their former courses, as to the spirit of them, and sin broke out. Immorality came into the church - grievous irregularities in the spirit of the church - a party spirit came into the church. One admired the eloquence of Apollos, and so he claimed to belong to Apollos, as if he was going to have a party; and another seeming to be blessed under Paul, claimed to be of Paul. Now the Apostle was sent to rebuke these evils, and solemnly, and severely, to command that the wicked person who had broken out into such immorality, should be put away. He sets before them in the chapters that have come along, what was to be; deals with them in doctrines; sets before them the blessedness of having one speech, and one mind, and one judgment, in the things of God; and now, in this chapter, and the verse particularly that I have read, He exhorts them - "Watch ye," - there are enemies, watch, - "stand fast in the faith," - given to you, put into your hearts, stand fast in that, - "quit you like men," be steadfast and strong. "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

"Watch ye," in some particular things. First, watch ye with respect to God. If the eye be off God, it is wrong. It is on wrong objects, - slothfulness, idleness of hands, fulness of bread, error of spirit, if not of doctrine, will always take the eye off God. The Galatians were subject to temptation, and they fell under temptation. Their eyes were bewitched. They had looked on Christ, and now they were looking on the law, and trying to mix it with the gospel. If your eye be off God, it is in a wrong place. You may look at all other things properly, if you look at them as related to God

and your souls in respect of Him, but, if the eye be off Him, then no object is rightly seen. I would just bring this before you, - "Watch ye." They had looked upon themselves, and upon that, they had looked upon distinctions in the social scale, and the rich traded upon their wealth, and the poor were made to feel their poverty in comparison, because God was not before them. Watch ... look for Him. The Psalmist had this blessed eye, this eye of faith. He said, as in the 130th psalm, "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning." You may look on your own soul wrongly, you may look on your exercises wrongly; indeed, as I have said, I believe you can look on nothing in a right way unless you have God before you in all things. "My soul waiteth for the Lord." He knew if the Lord came, everything would be right. He felt, the Lord being away, everything was wrong. And you, blessed with grace to watch, will just say the same thing. Nothing is right, no affliction is right, no providence is right, unless God be before us. Here we have need of faith. Watch in respect of Him. Do you look out for Him - is He the desire of your souls? Can you say, honestly, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God"? Is Emmanuel in His beauty the One you want and seek after? Is His righteousness the one covering you would have; His fountain of merit, into which you would be plunged; His love, that you would feel; His goodness, under which you would melt; His power, by which you would be sustained; His wisdom, by which you would be guided? If we see Him, we see all things necessary. We see everything that we can desire, if we see Him. God reveals these things by His Spirit. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him, but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." Watch this. And in this particular connection, let us look first at watching His operations.

His operations are twofold. First, in the heart; second in providence. Because a man is left to his own blindness, and does not observe the operation of God's hand, he is destroyed. You will see, that if you are enabled to watch God's hand and operation, you will find in your soul, much to instruct you and gather your heart and affections up to Himself. The prophet Habakkuk had this before him - "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, - (my defended place) - and will watch to see what He will say unto me, and

what I shall answer when I am reproved." Look for these operations. You say again and again you have nothing but evil in yourselves, and that is painfully, shamefully true, but if you have a heart to watch for God's gracious operations working the work of faith with power, that the name of the Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, you will find, that that will help and teach and enlarge and confirm and establish you from time to time. The operations of the Spirit of God, are the touches, influences, directions, reproofs and comforts, administrations; all these are in the operations of God's hand in the soul. Do you find any of them? Do you find faith strengthened at any time, to look to, to depend upon the Lord Jesus for salvation, for teaching, for protection, for every good thing? "Faith in the bleeding Lamb" is one of the best blessings children of God have in this world, and when a sinner is under the operation of the hand of God which he is made to observe, then it is, that he is strong in faith. It is written of one, "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith." He esteemed the power of God above all impossible things in nature. Now if you have faith, you will esteem grace to be more than sin; love in God to be more than your enmity against Him; justification to be more than your guilt; sanctification to be more than your pollution, but you will need faith, and faith is of the operation of God; not only in the creation of it, but in all the motions of it. In all the conflicts it has to meet and enter into, and with all the victories it obtains, it is of the operation of God. It is not a machine set going and left, it is just a creature to be sustained and strengthened and guided by Him who created it. Watch! Depend upon it, if you are left to be indifferent, - I speak to those who fear God, - if you are left to be indifferent to these operations of God's hand you will be very far from Him very soon. You will be in a poor lean condition, unless you are enabled to watch for this great thing, faith, to be strengthened. They prayed of old - "Increase our faith," and God does increase faith. He speaks, and faith listens; He shines, and faith observes. It is a great thing then, to watch for this, and watch to see whether God brings you into the dust of self-abasement; whether any reproof wounds you; whether any solemn instruction is given to you in your conscience, whereby you perceive the increase in your soul of humility, and you can take a low place and love to be there - when you feel like Mercy, in Pilgrim's Progress. She was never more comfortable than when in the valley of humiliation.

You will always love that place when you are in it. Now watch for this.... Nature is a piece of pride, and a proud look is one of the seven abominations before the Lord. Beware of pride. Watch for the operation of God's goodness to lead you to repentance; into the valley of humiliation, where you will find a little place big enough; where you will find your soul glad to be low. "He that is down needs fear no fall; he that is low, no pride." And watch for this that God has to give, and does give, namely, His precious eternal love. Love set on a sinner; love coming into a sinner's soul; love healing him of his wounds, comforting him in his tribulations; love strengthening his faith and walking hand in hand with it; love that thinks no evil of God, that believes all things concerning Him, that endures all things that He sends; love that always justifies Him. "Watch ye." Are you indifferent to the love of God? Are you satisfied with saying, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation", and never watch to see whether that blessed salvation comes - 'Say unto my soul', "I have loved thee with an everlasting love", and yet never look out for the coming of that? Then, it shows what a sleepy slothful state you are in. Watch for God's operations on your soul. It will be one of the sweetest experiences you can have here below, when the love of God is felt in your heart. Watch, and look out for, "the earnest of the Spirit." "The earnest of the Spirit", is a part of the inheritance, and it says, - as the firstfruits taken before God, said the harvest was coming, - the earnest of the Spirit in your heart will say, 'heaven is yours!' - a great piece of the inheritance. Like a child living on, and getting something daily out of the inheritance upon which one day he is to enter, so, when the Holy Spirit comes and brings the gospel, brings Christ in some particular into your heart, that, is the "earnest", - an earnest never to be repudiated by Him who gives it, - never! If you have the earnest, and can take it in faith to God, now and again, and say to Him reverently, 'Didst Thou not give me this?' - He won't disown it. No, you will get something further. Remember Thy holy promise, was taking before Him the earnest which He had given. Watch ye in respect of God, because if you do watch, under the Spirit's power, you look out for Him who "filleth all in all." You will be looking for Him who fills all things, all vessels of mercy; fills them with mercy, fills them with unspeakable satisfaction; fills them with an unspeakable joy and rejoicing sometimes, therefore, - "Watch ye."

Watch for God in respect of providence. Providence is God's servant. Providence is sometimes His heavenly voice, - His voice in the conscience - either of reproof or of comfort and confirmation. Reproof if you have done wrong, or are in a wrong way, or in confirmation if He finds you in a right way and tells you that you are in a right way. O God's providence is very wonderful. The operation of His hand is very beautiful in providence. Abraham's servant looked on, wondering whether God had led him in the right way, and to the right person whom He Himself, the divine Lord, had chosen for Isaac's wife. He looked on Manoah, and his wife looked on, while the angel of the Lord did wonderously, and if we have eyes to watch, we shall see a good deal in the holy and wise providence of God. Now a child of God may be carried away from this watch tower, he may think Jonah-like when trouble comes, he does well to be angry. Jonah was not watching God then, but the gourd, and he thought he did well to be angry; and if your eyes are on yourself and on your discomforts, on your troubles, and God not at all there to you, then you find you have nothing but barrenness, and eventually, guilt, the guilt that comes from your rebellious feelings. But if you are enabled to follow God in His dealings with you, in an affliction that He sends, in a comfort that He gives, you will find edification. In the Hebrews, we are told about the "peaceable fruit of righteousness". To whom? To people who are exercised. No affliction seemeth to be joyous, but grievous. Watch how it works in you. See what discoveries affliction makes in your conscience, in your spirit; see how it may bring to light some hidden monster; some idol it drags into the light of God's countenance. Now if you can do this, God will be first. He will be first in your confessions - "I have sinned." That will be the thing. It will come out of your heart, 'I have sinned, I am guilty of idolatry.' Now see too, how the Lord does sometimes come in a way of help and comfort, giving submission to His holy will. He sheds His light on a providence, as being sent by Him to do you good, and then you come to the Psalmist's mind and confession: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes - before I was afflicted I went astray." You will come, with Asaph, to find that you have nothing here, only God to look to. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." Watch God in respect of providence.

"Watch ye." Is He the object of your faith? Is He the centre of your soul? Is he "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending"? Would you, if you might, would you have Him first in everything and last in everything? O it is great to have your eye set on God and for God to fill your eye. Then your eye indeed is so light that you know where you are going. Walk otherwise, you know not where you are going, nor at what you stumble. "Watch ye" in the next place in respect of yourselves. You say, 'you are going to turn us into self.' Yes and no. Watch ye in respect of yourselves. Ask yourselves this question - now where are our affections placed? Well, you say - we wish them to be on God. If the wish be a spiritual one, it is an evidence that they are there. If it be a spiritual desire it is an evidence that in the main, your affections are where you would have them. See if it is so. Affection is that passion of the soul, passion of nature, that must have an object. It is not sufficient for itself. It must have an object, and if you follow this, you may be enabled to come to a conclusion, a right conclusion, as to where your affection is placed. Who is the object? Search and try in this particular, your own way. Who is the object? Could you honestly, at least in your desire, go with Asaph and say, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" Could you say it, and looking on the earth, looking at your nature and its desires and requirements, could you say, "and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." I understand that to be, by comparison. There is none upon earth that can bear comparison with God, and also this - there is none that can do, or give satisfaction but in and by God. All things here come from Him, and they are satisfactory, they are good as they are enjoyed in and from Him. See where the object of your desire is. Who is the object? "Watch ye". Says Hart,

"All my desires are now content
To be comprised in one."

Toplady has the same truth,

"Compared with Christ, in all beside
No comeliness I see;
The one thing needful, dearest Lord,
Is to be one with Thee."

The promise is: "Them that honour Me I will honour." Now if you have this faith, this fixedness of heart upon that blessed Object, you will find God honouring it. Sooner or later He will come, and if you

say, 'Lord I cannot live without Thee' - it will be as if He replies, 'You shall not lack Me.' He never gives hunger to mock with a stone. He never gives a prayer for Himself, to turn the sinner so praying, away unsatisfied. He never will. Watch ye in this particular. Indifference in this point is a most solemn indifference. Carelessness here is terrible. Carelessness in religion - there is plenty of it. Fervent desire - well, this is not so common.

"Watch ye" in respect of sin. "Take heed," says the Holy Ghost in the Hebrews, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God," and also, "lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." If sin becomes less dreadful, less abominable; if some of it be a little one to spare, of which you will say, "Is it not a little one", then you are in a bad condition. Watch, in this particular. If the Corinthian church had been particular here, the outbreaks which came and defiled and deformed them and turned them aside, in various members, they would never have done these things, for, "He that is down needs fear no fall." He who fears himself, is kept from himself. The child of God seldom enters into things he fears, with respect to sin. If he is afraid of a fall, his cry is, "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe." If he fears backsliding, his cry is, 'Keep me near Thee, for Thou knowest I am but a worm.' If he fears his affections being turned aside, his cry is, "Set me as a seal upon Thine heart, as a seal upon Thine arm." It is dreadful to live careless of sin. It is good to watch it. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." And the keeping of the heart with diligence, is crying to God to keep down the corruptions of it. To put His hand on them, to let them not reign. "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me." It is pleading the promise, 'Say Lord, that sin shall not have dominion over me, that I am not under the law, but under grace.' "Watch ye."

There are many things that, as far as I can observe and judge now, grow out of this word - "Watch ye". Watch ye with respect to a church. The one beauty of a church, is in God. All the excellences of the church come from Him. The steadfastness, the love, the humility, the faith, the zeal for the glory of God in a church, all come from Him, and depend upon it, if we here are left as a church

to indifference as to God's presence, as to His rule in our souls, as to the truth, in our consciences and as a girdle around our loins, we shall get into a bad state, and one thing that God nauseates is a lukewarm state. - "I would thou wert cold or hot." Therefore, I would say to you, what I say to myself, in my own solemn position - watch in this matter. Are you concerned whether God is among us or not? Is there a matter about which you feel you have to cry to Him, not only that your own individual soul may be kept, but that God would keep the church; that we may not have what we have, only an external peace, but may we have an internal peace with Himself, and the operations of His Spirit and the power of His truth, and the sweetness of His love, and the glory of His blessed presence walking among us. The Corinthian church had not always been careful in this. The outbreaks of sin and the grievous irregularities, all of which you can read in this epistle, had they been careful about the presence of God with them as a church, would not have been. It is said in the psalm: "Oh that My people had hearkened unto Me." If they had been wise to have listened to Him, then, He said, their enemies would have been subdued unto them and He would have fed them with the finest of the wheat. There are no ifs, no contingencies, in respect of eternal salvation, but there are a good many such things in respect of the walk of the people of God here below, and without at all legalizing, as I think, the exhortation of the gospel addressed to the people of God, one may say, if a church is left to an indifference with respect to the Lord's presence, and the power of His grace, and the glory of His walking amongst them, then they sink into an evil condition and it is bad with them. Irregularities in worship may be secret, - some of you may be very indifferent about worshipping God when you come; gracious people may for a time be indifferent about their own heart's regularities or irregularities. It may be a grievous irregularity in some of you as you sit here from time to time, when your hearts go after the things of the world. Business may come in. Your wicked things may come and get indulgence while you sit here. Now, if God gives grace to you and you say, 'Lord, I am going up to meet with Thy people, do keep my heart, keep my mind, keep my attention, open my conscience to the truth. Let not the word drop by the side of me, but into my soul, let it be really Thy truth to me, and let me worship Thee without distraction of those things that I have so often indulged in', - watch....

Ministers watch for their hearers, and it is a mercy when hearers watch with respect to what God has said to the churches. Read ... And I would say read often, as you may have opportunity. Read the seven letters to the seven churches in Asia. See how kind Christ was to point out the faults of these churches. Listen by the faith of God's operation, listen to the warnings and the threats that Christ uttered to those churches. O, but if you say they have no reference to us, then you are in an evil case, you are in an evil case if you so speak, but if you are enabled to hold to this, that these letters have reference to the church of Christ and will have some reference to her as long as the world lasts, it may be of great service to you. "Watch ye." Look at this church at Corinth. Take notice of it. See its planting. Look at its gifts and the grace of it, and see how God gave it a testimony, and that Paul said God would confirm that testimony, and then see the decline that came. I have trembled for people who say they would not do this and they would not do that. I gave a hint some time ago to a minister living a long way from here, respecting some things of which he was speaking with great confidence, - I gave a hint that it might possibly come to pass there would be a declension. "O no," he said, "it is not possible," but it has begun, and I can see it. My brethren, watch! I speak to the church, and all gracious people. Remember Christ's promise, "Where two or three are gathered together --- there I am" and O, as you may know in your individual souls, some of you, how that you have been indifferent to His presence and have said, 'I am in bed and I cannot rise', I say, if you understand that, think of how it may come to pass in a church. A church may say, 'Well, we are satisfied, we are at peace, we are content.' How near to danger, how near to some apostasy that church may be - "Watch ye." Paul said it to these Corinthians whom he had so solemnly rebuked, "Watch ye." So I say to you my brethren this morning, watch, in respect to the presence of God. A promising Christ, but a jealous Christ; a promising Spirit, but a jealous Spirit; a promising Father, but a jealous Father. O see if your souls are concerned about this great matter, and may the Lord help me, and help us to labour together for His gracious presence in our souls, and for His presence at our meetings, and for the Spirit of Christ to deal with our consciences and draw out our affections and cause us to hear as for eternity, and cause us to fear His great name and fear offending Him, lest He should go away from us. O, if you can, pray about the ministry. As the Apostle said, "Brethren, pray for us," I would say

to you, that a door of utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth as I ought to do and speak of the mystery of God. And I would pray for you, and that we may pray one for another, is my desire, lest God should go away from us. For if He should go away, and He knows how I deprecate it daily, if He should go away from this church, what is there worth having?

Now may the Lord help conscience to speak, and give us grace to walk in this exhortation - "Watch ye." I was going to say other things, but I must not enter on them now, except to say, - watch, lest there should be an outbreak of sin in any of us - watch lest the devil should be permitted to bring in some heresy. You think you are safe. Who is safe except kept - who is safe except kept? I am an old man and look for the end, but one of my prayers, very frequent prayer too, is this, that God would not allow me to receive any error into my understanding - into my heart. I think I know something about the Scriptures, not much, but a little, but error could soon darken all. Error could soon turn my feet out of the way of understanding, and so it could be with you, it could be with us as a church. Watch in this respect lest there be any outbreak of open sin disgracing the profession we make; lest we should be left to have growing in our midst a root of bitterness to defile many; lest we should be left to go after other gods. You say, 'Of course we should not' - and so Israel said, but, Israel did!

May the Lord keep us, and graciously help us to obey this blessed word - "Watch ye."

* * * * *