

~Other Speakers G-L: Raymond Golsworthy:

“For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.” Mark 13:34

One of the marvels of Christ’s ministry was His ability to present the deepest truths in the simplest and briefest terms. For those who have eyes to see it, there is, in the single sentence quoted above, a concentration of deep church truth, and a survey of the whole present dispensation. It merits our closest attention.

In this verse the Lord tells of a wealthy householder who, obliged to undertake some foreign travel, preceded his departure by gathering together his employees and explaining what would need to be done during his absence. Some, it seems, were given “power of attorney”, qualifying them to negotiate various business transactions during the unspecified period of the master’s absence. Others were briefed concerning practical tasks that would need to be undertaken either in the fields or in the homestead itself. Uppermost in the householder’s mind seems to have been his concern that those left behind should remain constantly alert, on the look-out for his return. We notice that the whole chapter (Mark 13) deals with our Lord’s second coming, and all that is said revolves around the key statement: “Then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with power and with great glory” (verse 26). Our brief story is calculated to bear down upon that truth, and is designed to show us in composite form, what it is that the Lord expects from His people, the church, during the present period of His absence from us. According to the story, His outstanding concerns are three:

1. He wants us to exercise authority during His absence.

This, we notice, is the first matter mentioned: “He gave authority to His servants”. Without a doubt one of the greatest revelations of the New Testament is that the church is a company of people “called out”; called out for administration. It is helpful to notice that the Greek word, “Ecclesia” (usually translated “church”) is applied to a group of citizens specially chosen to exercise authority in civic affairs (Acts 19:39). In like manner we may say that the Lord’s church consists of a people called out to exercise authority in the spiritual world. In connection with His church our Lord said: “And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:18-19). It is striking that the same words are repeated exactly where the reference is to the local expression of the church (Matthew 18:18). These are the only two occasions on which the Lord is quoted as actually using the word “church”, and in both cases he makes it plain that it consists of a people called out for administration and authority. This, then, is an authority which has clearly been delegated to us by our absent Master, and it may be used to the extent to which we ourselves are subject to His will. With it we may bind God’s enemies, and even resist the devil himself, so that he will flee from us (James 4:7). And by this authority we may “loose” situations and set captives free. This, evidently, is a primary function of the church during the period of our Master’s absence. How sad it is that so few Christians know anything of a spiritual authority! So much is possible through believing prayer because of the authority of the name in which we pray. We need to allow the word of God to enlighten us as to the church’s calling to apply the power of that name to actual situations and we also need the Lord’s help to be faithful in this matter.

2. He has much work for us to do during His absence.

We are told that this householder “gave to every man his work”. This also is significant and basic. None of us would question that there is very much work that needs to be done before the Lord returns. Just prior to His going, our Lord said: “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). The fact is that we who are the Lord’s people have been put in trust with the gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:4). Today as much as ever there is a great deal of sowing of the seed which needs to be done in a worldwide context, to say nothing of the harvest waiting to be reaped from seed already sown. Now is the time for such evangelistic witness. But Peter’s commission reminds us that now is also the time in which we have the commands: “Feed My sheep” and “Feed My lambs” (John 21:15-17). This refers to other activities and callings which are unrelated to the same household and to be done in the light of Christ’s near return. It is strenuous work, as all vital service must surely be, but it is the very work for which our absent Lord has provided full sufficiency.

If the Lord gives His church work to do then He can be trusted always to provide the resources for it. We shall not get very far if we take the matter up in our natural strength or fleshly energy, but we do not need to do this, for the Spirit’s power is freely available for those who give themselves to toil for the Lord in the light of His coming. It was after his thrilling words about the coming glory that Paul told the Corinthians to be: “steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). In that same

chapter he had revealed the secret of his own successful work for Christ through the years: "yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

It is strikingly true that when the expectation of the return of Christ is forgotten or obscured, the work of the Lord languishes. According to our text the Lord has given to every man his work during the period of His absence, and we understand that when He does come back He will take a lively interest in noting to what degree His commands have been obeyed. We have work out in the field, sowing the seed of the kingdom and reaping the harvest of His sacrificial death, and we all have allotted tasks inside the house (1 Timothy 3:15), ministering to one another and providing for that which is beautiful in His sight; and really this is all one work to be undertaken purely and simply for the Master's gain and pleasure. If we are taken up with our own interests, our own future, our own likes and dislikes, then we shall lose sight of the fact that the Lord is at the door, and so become slack about spiritual things when we should take pleasure in being busy in His service. The devil tries to tell us that our efforts and sacrifices are unappreciated, that nobody seems to notice whether we pull our weight in the Lord's house or not. He even suggests to us that the Lord does not show any special sign of delight in what we do, or disappointment when we do not do it. The great consideration which will deliver us from all his wily temptations is to remember Christ's words: "Behold, I come quickly". With those words ringing in our ears how much more will we attempt in His name, while we do it in glad anticipation of our Lord's return.

3. He has a special desire that we should be constantly watching for His return.

Together with all the other commandments and orders, we are told that the householder gave special instructions about watching: "He commanded the porter to watch" (see also verses 33, 35 and 36). We are all to share in the authority, all to share in the labours and all to share in the watching. In this sense we are all "porters". Now this was not just because the Lord likes to know that His people are eager to see and welcome Him, though this is true, but His command was given because He knows very well that this glad anticipation of His coming provides the essential motivation for utmost diligence in His business, and for patient persistence in the sacrifices which His will entails. How true it is that behind the unspiritual behaviour of so many Christians lies a sort of idea that the Lord is delaying His coming! Take away this active watching for Christ and you lose the supreme incentive for holy living. The surest way to have the loins girded for service and the light burning in clear testimony is to be "like unto men that wait for their Lord" (Luke 12:35,36).

Would it not be true to state that in a general survey of all that has been said to the church for this particular dispensation, the Lord's paramount concern is that His people should be: "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13)? The scriptural instructions about the Lord's table make it plain that not only are we to look thankfully back to our Saviour's crucifixion, but also to look on with eager expectation to His return in glory. All through the centuries, the promise of the second coming has been like a lamp in the night, and in the darkest hours it has brought "and to this day brings" "untold comfort and encouragement to sorely-pressed saints. We believe that now the appointed time is near, for explicit signs are being fulfilled before our eyes. How much more, then, should we be found earnestly watching!

Paul tells us that the Lord is going to give: "a crown of righteousness" to all those who love His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8). To love that appearing entails much more than just accepting or propagating the doctrine, and much more than merely waiting for an event. It is one thing to be waiting at an airport for some public figure, consulting as to the time of arrival and seeking out a good vantage point for watching, but it is quite another thing to be waiting eagerly for the long-desired homecoming of a beloved relation or friend. It is because you love the Comer that you love the coming.

The outstanding idea associated with the return of Christ is that He comes to claim his blood-bought bride. So when we have said everything about the church's privilege to administer the will of God in His name and to work devotedly in His service and even to be watchers for His coming, we have not reached this most sacred and glorious of all aspects of His return, namely that He comes as the heavenly Bridegroom. Amid all the interests and attractions, yes and cares, of this world; amid all the thrills and problems of Christian work; supreme and paramount above all else the Lord longs for His people to be so in love with Him personally that every part of their lives is governed by the fact that He will soon be here and by a holy resolve not to be "ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28).