

**Articles and Sermons :: Occupy Till I Come - J.C. Ryle**

Occupy Till I Come - J.C. Ryle - posted by AbideinHim (), on: 2009/4/29 6:43

Excerpt from "Occupy Till I Come"

The third and last question I wish to consider, is this: What is the present duty of all Christ's professing disciples?

When I speak of present duty, I mean, of course, their duty between the period of Christ's first and second advent. And I find an answer in the words of the nobleman, in the parable, to his servants: he "delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come."

Reader, I know few words more searching and impressive than these four: "Occupy till I come." They are spoken to all who profess and call themselves Christians. They address the conscience of every one who has not renounced his baptism, and formally turned his back on Christianity. They ought to stir up all hearers of the Gospel to examine themselves whether they are in the faith, and to prove themselves. Listen to me for a few minutes, while I try to impress them on your attention. For your sake, remember, these words were written: "Occupy till I come."

The Lord Jesus bids you "occupy." By that He means that you are to be "a doer" in your Christianity, and not merely a hearer and professor. He wants His servants not only to receive His wages, and eat His bread, and dwell in His house, and belong to His family, —but also to do His work. You are to "let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works." (Matt. v. 16.) Have you faith? It must not be a dead faith: it must "work by love." (Gal. v. 6.) Are you elect? You are elect unto "obedience." (1 Pet. i. 2.) Are you redeemed? You are redeemed that you may be "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." (Tit. ii. 14.) Do you love Christ? Prove the reality of your love by keeping Christ's commandments. (John xiv. 15.) Oh, reader, do not forget this charge to "occupy!" Beware of an idle, talking, gossiping, sentimental, do-nothing religion. Think not because your doings cannot justify you, or put away one single sin, that therefore it matters not whether you do anything at all. Away with such a delusion! Cast it behind you as an invention of the devil. Think of the house built upon the sand, and its miserable end. (Matt. vii. 24-27.) As ever you would "make your calling and election sure," be a doing Christian.

But the Lord Jesus also bids you "occupy your pound." By this He means that He has given each one of His people some opportunity of glorifying Him. He would have you understand that everyone has got his own sphere, —the poorest as well as the richest; that everyone has an open door before him, and may, if he will, show forth his Master's praise. Your bodily health and strength, your mental gifts and capacities, your money and your earthly possessions, your rank and position in life, your example and influence with others, your liberty to read the Bible and hear the Gospel, your plentiful supply of means of grace, —all these are your "pounds." All these are to be used and employed with a continual reference to the glory of Christ: all these are His gifts. "Of Him come riches and honour." (1 Chron. xxix. 12.) "His is the silver, and His the gold." (Hagg. ii. 8.) "His is your body, and His is your spirit." (1 Cor. vi. 20.) "He appoints your habitation: He gives you life and breath." (Acts xvii. 25, 26.) You are not your own: you are bought with a price. (1 Cor. vi. 20.) Surely it is no great matter if He bids you honour Him and serve Him with all that you have. Breathes there the man or woman among the readers of this tract that has received nothing at the Lord's hand! Not one, I am sure. Oh, see to it, that you pay out your Lord's money well and honestly! Take heed that you do not bury your pound!

But the Lord Jesus bids you also to "occupy till He comes." By that He means that you are to do His work on earth, like one who continually looks for His return. You are to be like the faithful servant, who knows not what hour his master may come home, but keeps all things in readiness, and is always prepared. You are to be like one who knows that Christ's coming is the great reckoning day, and to be ready to render up your account at any moment. You are not to suppose that you have any freehold in this world, nor even a lease: the greatest and the richest of mankind is only God's tenant-at-will. You are not to neglect any social duty or relation of life because of the uncertainty of the Lord's return. You are to fill the station to which God has called you in a godly and Christian way; and you are to be ready to go from the place of business to meet Christ in the air, if the Lord shall think fit. You are to be like a man who never knows what a day might bring forth and, therefore, to put off nothing till a "convenient season." You are to rise and go forth in the morning, ready, if need be, to meet Christ at noon. You are to lie down in bed at night, ready, if need be, to be awakened by the midnight cry, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh!" You are to keep your spiritual accounts in a state of constant preparation, like one who never knows how soon they may be called for. You are to measure all your ways by the measure of Christ's appearing,

and to do nothing in which you would not like Jesus to find you engaged. This is to "occupy" till Jesus comes.

Think, reader, how condemning are these words to thousands of professing Christians! What an utter absence of preparation appears in their daily walk and conversation! How thoroughly unfit they are to meet Christ! They know nothing of occupying the gifts of God as loans for which they must give account. They show not the slightest desire to glorify Him with "body and spirit which are His." They give no sign of readiness for the second advent. Well says old Gurnal, "It may be written on the grave of every unconverted man, Here lies one who never did for God an hour's work." Who can wonder in a world like this, if a minister often cries to his congregation, "Ye must be born again:" "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." (John iii. 7; Matt. xviii. 3.)

Think again, how arousing these words ought to be to all who are rich in this world, but do not know how to spend their money rightly. Alas, there are many who live on as if Christ had never said anything about the difficulty of rich men being saved! They are rich towards their own pleasures, or their own tastes, or their own families, but not rich towards God! They live as if they would not have to give an account of their use of money; they live as if there was no reckoning day before the bar of Christ: they live as if Christ had never said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts xx. 35.) "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in heaven that faileth not." (Luke xii. 33.) Oh, if this tract should by chance fall into the hands of such a one, I do beseech you consider your ways and be wise. Cease to be content with giving God's cause a few shillings, or an occasional guinea; give far more liberally than you have done yet: give hundreds where you now give tens; give thousands where you now give hundreds. Then, and not till then, I shall believe you are "occupying," as one who looks for Christ's return. Alas, for the covetousness and narrow-mindedness of the Church of these days! May the Lord open the eyes of rich Christians.

Think again, how instructive are these words to all who are troubled by doubts about mingling with the world, and taking part in its vain amusements. It is useless to tell us that races, and balls, and theatres, and operas, and cards, are not for bidden by name in Scripture. The question we should ask ourselves is simply this,—"Am I occupying, as one who looks for Christ's return, when I take part in these things? Should I like Jesus to return suddenly and find me on the race-course, or in the ball-room, or at the theatre, or at the card-table? Should I think I was in my right place, and where my Lord would have me to be?" Oh, dear reader, this is the true test by which to try all our daily occupations and employment of time! That thing which we would not do if we thought Jesus was coming tonight, that thing we ought not to do at all. That place to which we would not go if we thought Jesus was coming this day, that place we ought to avoid. That company in which we would not like Jesus to find us, in that company we ought never to sit down. Oh, that men would live as in the sight of Christ! not as in the sight of man, or of the Church, or of ministers,—but as in the sight of Christ! This would be "occupying till He comes."

But think how encouraging are these words to all who seek first the kingdom of God; and love the Lord Christ in sincerity. What though the children of the world regard them as "righteous overmuch!" What though mistaken friends and relations tell them they pay too much attention to religion, and go too far! Those words, "Occupy till I come," are words which justify their conduct. They may well reply to their persecutors, "I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down: I am striving to live so as to be ready when the Lord comes, 'I must be about my Father's business.'"

Let me conclude this tract by a few words of general application.

(1) First, let me draw from the whole subject a word of solemn warning for every one into whose hands this tract may fall. That warning is,—that there is a great change yet to come on this world, and a change we ought to keep constantly before our mind's eye.

That change is a change of MASTERS. That old rebel, the devil, and all his adherents, shall be cast down. The Lord Jesus, and all His saints, shall be exalted and raised to honour. "The kingdoms of this world" shall "become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ." (Rev. xi. 15.)

That change is a change of manners. Sin shall no longer be made light of and palliated. Wickedness shall no longer go unpunished and unreprieved. Holiness shall become the general character of the inhabitants of the earth: "The new heaven and new earth" shall be the dwelling of "righteousness." (2 Pet. iii 13,)

That change is a change of opinion. There shall be no more Socinianism, or Deism, or Scepticism, or Infidelity. All nations shall do honour to the crucified Lamb of God: all men shall know Him, from the least to the greatest. "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of Him, as the waters cover the sea." (Isa. xi. 9.)

I say nothing as to the time when these things shall take place. I object, on principle, to all dogmatism about dates. All I insist upon is this, "that there is a great change before us all—a change for the earth, a change for man, and above all, a change for the saints."

I accept the prediction that "there is a great improvement and development of human nature yet to take place." I accept it with all my heart. But how and when shall it be brought about? Not by any system of education! Not by any legislation of politicians! Not by anything short of the appearing of the kingdom of Christ. Then, and then only, shall there be universal justice, universal knowledge, and universal peace.

I accept the common phrase of many, "There is a good time coming." I accept it with all my heart. I do verily believe there shall one day be no more poverty, "no more oppression, "no more ignorance, "no more grinding competition, "no more covetousness. But when shall that good time come? Never—never till the return of Jesus Christ at His second advent! And for whom shall that time be good? For none but those who know and love the Lord.

I accept the common phrase, "There is a man coming who will set all right that is now wrong. We wait for the coming man." I accept it with all my heart. I do look for one who shall unravel the tangled skein of this world's affairs, and put everything in its right place. But who is the great physician for an old, diseased, worn-out world? It is the man Christ Jesus who is yet to return.

Oh, reader, let us realize this point! There is before us all a great change. Surely, when a man has notice to quit his present dwelling-place, he ought to make sure that he has before him another home.

(2) Next, let me draw from the whole subject a solemn question for all into whose hands this tract may fall. That question is simply this: ARE YOU READY FOR THE GREAT CHANGE? Are you ready for the coming and kingdom of Christ?

Remember, I do not ask what you think about controversial points in the subject of prophecy. I do not ask your opinion about preterism and futurism; I do not ask whether you think revelation fulfilled or unfulfilled—or whether you consider the Man of Sin to be an individual—or whether you hold prophetic days to be years. About all these points you and I may err, and yet be saved. The one point to which I want to fix you down is this, "Are you ready for the kingdom of Christ?"

It is useless to tell me, that, in asking this, I put before you too high a standard. It is vain to tell me that a man may be a very good man, and yet not be ready for the kingdom of Christ. I deny it altogether. I say that every justified and converted man is ready, and that if you are not ready, you are not a justified man. I say that the standard I put before you is nothing more than the New Testament standard, and that the Apostles would have doubted the truth of your religion if you were not looking and longing for the coming of the Lord. I say, above all, that the grand end of the Gospel is to prepare men to meet God. What has your Christianity done for you if it has not made you meet for the kingdom of Christ. Nothing: nothing! Nothing at all! Oh, that you may think on this matter, and never rest till you are ready to meet Christ!

(3) In the next place let me offer an invitation to all readers who do not feel ready for Christ's return. That invitation shall be short and simple. I beseech you to know your danger, and come to Christ without delay, that you may be pardoned, justified, and made ready for things to come. I entreat you this day to "flee from the wrath to come," to the hope set before you in the Gospel. I pray you in Christ's stead, to lay down enmity and unbelief, and at once "to be reconciled to God." (2 Cor. v. 20.)

I tremble when I think of the privileges which surround you in this country, and of the peril in which you stand so long as you neglect them. I tremble when I think of the possibility of Christ coming again, and of your being found unpardoned and unconverted in the day of His return. Better a thousand times will be his lot who was born a heathen, and never heard the Gospel, than the lot of him who has been a member of a Church, but not a living member of Christ. Surely the time past may suffice you to have delayed and lingered about your soul. Awake this day! "Awake thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give thee light." (Eph. v. 14.)

Lay aside everything that stands between you and Christ. Cast away everything that draws you back, and prevents you from feeling ready for the Lord's appearing. Find out the besetting sin that weighs you down, and tear it from your heart, however dear it may be. Cry mightily to the Lord Jesus to reveal Himself to your soul. Rest not till you have got a real, firm, and reasonable hope, and know that your feet are on the Rock of Ages: rest not till you can say, "The Lord may come; the earth may be shaken; the foundations of the round world may be overturned; but thank God I have got treasure in heaven, and an advocate with the Father, and I will not be afraid."

Do this, and you shall have got something from reading a simple tract.

(4) Last of all, let me draw from the subject an exhortation to all who know Christ indeed, and love His appearing. That exhortation is simply this,—"that you will strive more and more to be a "doing" Christian. (James i. 22.) Labour more and more to show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into marvellous light; improve every talent which the Lord Jesus has committed to your charge to the setting forth of His glory; let your walk declare plainly that you seek a country; let your conformity to the mind of Christ be unquestionable and unmistakable. Let your holiness be a clear plain fact, which even the worst enemies of the Gospel cannot deny.

Above all, if you are a student of prophecy, I entreat you never to let it be said that prophetic study prevents practical diligence. If you do believe that the day is really approaching, then labour actively to provoke others unto love and good works; if you do believe that the night is far spent, be doubly diligent to cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Never was there a greater mistake than to fancy the doctrine of the personal return of Christ is calculated to paralyse Christian diligence. Surely there can be no greater spur to the servant's activity than the expectation of his master's speedy return.

This is the way to attain a healthy state of soul. There is nothing like the exercise of our graces for promoting our spiritual vigour. Alas, there are not a few of God's saints who complain that they want spiritual comfort in their religion, while the fault is altogether in themselves. "Occupy," "Occupy," I would say to such persons. Lay yourselves out more heartily for the glory of God, and these uncomfortable feelings will soon vanish away.

This is the way to do good to the children of the world. Nothing, under God, has such an effect on unconverted people as the sight of a real, thorough-going live Christian. There are thousands who will not come to hear the Gospel, and do not know the meaning of justification by faith, who yet can understand an uncompromising, holy, consistent walk with God. "Occupy," "Occupy," I say again, if you want to do good.

This is the way to promote meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. There will be no idleness in the kingdom of Christ: the saints and angels shall there wait on their Lord with unwearied activity, and serve Him day and night. It is a fine saying of Bernard, that Jacob in his vision saw some angels ascending, and some descending, but none standing still. "Occupy," "Occupy," I say again, if you would be thoroughly trained for your glorious home.

Oh, brethren believers, it would be well indeed if we did but see clearly how much it is for our interest and happiness to occupy every farthing of our Lord's money,—to live very near to God!

So living we shall find great joy in our work—great comfort in our trials—great doors of usefulness in the world—great consolation in our sicknesses—great hope in our death—leave great evidences behind us when we are buried—have great confidence in the day of Christ's return—and receive a great crown in the day of reward.

Re: Occupy Till I Come - J.C. Ryle , on: 2009/4/29 13:49

Amen! Thank you!

Excerpt from J.C. Ryle Commentary -

MATTHEW 24

We are not to expect a reign of universal peace, happiness, and prosperity, before the end comes. If we do, we shall be greatly deceived. Our Lord bids us look for "wars, famines, pestilence," and persecution. It is vain to expect peace until the Prince of Peace returns. Then, and not until then, the swords shall be beaten into ploughshares, and nations learn war no more. Then, and not until then, the earth shall bring forth her increase. (Isaiah, 2:4 Psalm. 68:6.)

We are not to expect a time of universal purity of doctrine and practice in the Church of Christ, before the end comes. If we do, we shall be greatly mistaken. Our Lord bids us look for the rising of "false prophets," the "abounding of iniquity," and the "waxing cold of the love of many." The truth will never be received by all professing Christians, and holiness be the rule among men, until the great Head of the Church returns, and Satan is bound. Then, and not until then, there will be a glorious Church, without spot or blemish. (Ephes. 5:27.)

We are not to expect that all the world will be converted before the end comes. If we do, we shall be greatly mistaken. "The Gospel is to be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations," but we must not think that we shall see it universally believed. It will "take out a people," wherever it is faithfully preached, as witnesses to Christ, but the full gathering of the nations shall never take place until Christ comes. Then, and not until then, shall the earth be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. (Acts 15:14; Habak. 2:14.)

Let us lay these things to heart, and remember them well. They are eminently truths for the present times. Let us learn to be moderate in our expectations from any existing machinery in the Church of Christ, and we shall be spared much disappointment. Let us make haste to spread the Gospel in the world, for the time is short, not long. The night comes when no man can work. Troublous times are ahead. Heresies and persecutions may soon weaken and distract the churches. A fierce war of principles may soon convulse the nations. The doors now open to do good may soon be shut forever. Our eyes may yet see the sun of Christianity go down like the sun of Judaism, in clouds and storms. Above all, let us long for our Lord's return. Oh! for a heart to pray daily, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

MATTHEW 24:15-28 -

It now remains for us to consider the lessons which this passage contains for our own personal edification. These lessons are plain and unmistakable. In them at least there is no darkness at all.

For one thing, we see that flight from danger may sometimes be the positive duty of a Christian. Our Lord Himself commanded his people under certain circumstances "to flee."

The servant of Christ undoubtedly is not to be a coward. He is to confess his master before men. He is to be willing to die, if needful, for the truth. But the servant of Christ is not required to run into danger, unless it comes in the line of duty. He is not to be ashamed to use reasonable means to provide for his personal safety, when no good is to be done by dying at his post. There is deep wisdom in this lesson. The true martyrs are not always those who court death, and are in a hurry to be beheaded or burned. There are times when it shows more grace to be quiet, and wait, and pray, and watch for opportunities, than to defy our adversaries, and rush into the battle. May we have wisdom to know how to act in time of persecution! It is possible to be rash, as well as to be a coward--and to stop our own usefulness by being over hot, as well as by being over cold.

Finally, we see from these verses, that whenever the second advent of Christ takes place, it will be a very SUDDEN event. It will be "as the lightning flashes from the east, and is seen even to the west."

This is a practical truth that we should ever keep before our minds. That our Lord Jesus will come again in person to this world, we know from Scripture. That He will come in a time of great tribulation, we also know. But the precise period, the year, the month, the day, the hour, are all hidden things. We only know that it will be a very sudden event. Our plain duty then is to live always prepared for His return. Let us walk by faith, and not by sight. Let us believe in Christ, serve Christ, follow Christ, and love Christ. So living, whenever Christ may return, we shall be ready to meet Him.

MATTHEW 24:29-35 -

These verses teach us, in the first place, that when the Lord Jesus returns to this world, He shall come with peculiar glory and majesty. He shall come "in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Before His presence the very sun, moon, and stars shall be darkened, and "the powers of heaven shall be shaken."

The SECOND personal coming of Christ shall be as different as possible from the FIRST. He came the first time as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was born in the manger of Bethlehem, in lowliness and humiliation. He took on him the form of a servant, and was despised and rejected of men. He was betrayed into the hands of wicked men, condemned by an unjust judgment, mocked, scourged, crowned with thorns, and at last crucified between two thieves. He shall come the second time as the King of all the earth, with all royal majesty. The princes and great men of this world shall themselves stand before His throne to receive an eternal sentence. Before him every mouth shall be stopped, and every knee bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. May we all remember this. Whatever ungodly men may do now, there will be no scoffing, no jesting at Christ, no infidelity at the last day. The servants of Jesus may well wait patiently. Their master shall one day be acknowledged King of kings by all the world.

These verses teach us, in the second place, that when Christ returns to this world, He will first take care of His believing

people. He shall "send his angels," and "gather together his elect."

In the day of judgment true Christians shall be perfectly safe. Not a hair of their heads shall fall to the ground. Not one bone of Christ's mystical body shall be broken. There was an ark for Noah, in the day of the flood. There was a Zoar for Lot, when Sodom was destroyed. There shall be a hiding-place for all believers in Jesus, when the wrath of God at last bursts on this wicked world. Those mighty angels who rejoiced in heaven when each sinner repented, shall gladly catch up the people of Christ to meet their Lord in the air. That day no doubt will be a dreadful day, but believers may look forward to it without fear.

In the day of judgment true Christians shall at length be gathered together. The saints of every age, and every tongue shall be assembled out of every land. All shall be there, from righteous Abel down to the last soul that is converted to God--from the oldest patriarch down to the little infant that just breathed and died. Let us think what a happy gathering that will be, when all the family of God are at length together. If it has been pleasant to meet one or two saints occasionally on earth, how much more pleasant will it be to meet a "multitude that no man can number!" Surely we may be content to carry the cross, and put up with partings for a few years. We travel on towards a day, when we shall meet to part no more.

Finally, these verses teach us, that our Lord's predictions will certainly be fulfilled. He says, "heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

Our Lord knew well the natural unbelief of human nature. He knew that scoffers would arise in the last days, saying, where is the promise of His coming? (2 Pet. 3:4.) He knew that when He came, faith would be rare on the earth. He foresaw how many would contemptuously reject the solemn predictions He had just been delivering as improbable, unlikely, and absurd. He warns us all against such skeptical thoughts, with a caution of peculiar solemnity. He tells us that, whatever man may say or think, His words shall be fulfilled in their season, and shall not "pass away," unaccomplished. May we all lay to heart His warning. We live in an unbelieving age. Few believed the report of our Lord's first coming, and few believe the report of His second. (Isaiah 53:1.) Let us beware of this infection, and believe to the saving of our souls. We are not reading cunningly devised fables, but deep and momentous truths. May God give us a heart to believe them.

This is a point which our blessed Master frequently presses upon our notice. We hardly ever find Him dwelling on the second advent without adding an injunction to "watch." He knows the sleepiness of our nature. He knows how soon we forget the most solemn subjects in religion. He knows how unceasingly Satan labors to obscure the glorious doctrine of His coming again. He arms us with heart-searching exhortations to keep awake, if we would not be ruined for evermore. May we all have an ear to hear them.

True Christians ought to live like WATCHMEN. The day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. They should strive to be always on their guard. They should behave like the sentinel of an army in an enemy's land.

They should resolve by God's grace not to sleep at their post. That text of Paul deserves many a thought--"let us not sleep, as the rest do, but let us watch and be sober." (1 Thess. 5:6.)

True Christians ought to live like GOOD SERVANTS, whose master is not at home. They should strive to be always ready for their master's return. They should never give way to the feeling, "my Lord is delaying his coming." They should seek to keep their hearts in such a frame, that whenever Christ appears, they may at once give Him a warm and loving reception. There is a vast depth in that saying, "Blessed is that servant whom his master finds doing so when he comes." We may well doubt whether we are true believers in Jesus, if we are not ready at any time to have our faith changed into sight.

Let us close the chapter with solemn feelings. The things we have just been reading call loudly for great searchings of heart. Let us seek to make sure that we are in Christ, and have an ark of safety when the day of wrath breaks on the world. Let us strive to live that we may be pronounced "blessed" at the last, and not cast off for evermore. Not least, let us dismiss from our minds the common idea that unfulfilled prophecy is a speculative and not a practical thing. If the things we have been considering are not practical, there is no such thing as practical religion at all. Well might John say, "Every one who has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure." (1 John 3:3.)