

## KEEPING AWAKE

I guess for most of us there have been times in our lives when we have wanted to stay awake all night. It might be because we wanted to read or study, maybe because we were excited about something happening the next day or because we were on a long journey and travelling at night was more convenient, maybe because we had to work. Whatever the reason it was sufficiently necessary or interesting to keep us awake. Yet as the night drew on tiredness sets in and often we awaken in the morning with a book fallen to the floor or if driving need to pull over and sleep. I have not worked at night very often but I found the hardest time was 3-4 am when my eyes wanted to close and concentration was at its worst.

I am sure we all remember the parable Jesus told about the 10 virgins, five of whom were wise and five who were foolish. All of them fell asleep waiting for the bridegroom to arrive. Though they all fell asleep the wise had at least prepared for the bridegroom coming, they had tried to remain alert and prepared before sleep (or death) overwhelmed them.

Now our primary goal in life must be to keep our eyes firmly fixed upon God's Kingdom and the things that we so dearly believe in. Indeed he cry shall very soon come, as stated in the parable of the 10 virgins:

"Here is the bridegroom come out to meet him!"

Now Jesus said that upon his return, the angels would go out to gather the elect from the four corners of the earth. What will our reaction will be then? Will we be alert and prepared? Shall we have thoughts of this life and what we are leaving behind, or shall we go with fear, yet joyful anticipation at the prospect of seeing our Lord at last.

Let us daily fix our eyes upon his coming Kingdom, for it will generate zeal to stay alert and striving to develop a character pleasing to the Lord Jesus. It has been a long night, the 'bridegroom' has tarried long and it is now almost dawn. It is well worth just considering and meditating upon what us to come to help us remain awake. Our Master **will** come, our hope is certain; as we read "Your eyes will see the King in his beauty and view a land that stretches far" Isaiah 33:17. At that time there will at last be peace when the earth is ruled by a righteous King, God's righteous and just law going forth as we read from Jerusalem.

We read that:

"In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more. Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig-tree, and no-one will make them

afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken. All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever." Micah 4:1-5.

With this wonderful vision of the kingdom to come, a time when the nations will be ruled by God's just law, is our resolve to "walk in the name of the Lord our God"? We have been called to know the one true God, our Creator, what an immense privilege! This calling is something we do not deserve and do not merit. It is a calling based upon the great mercy of our Father in heaven. So, how much does that coming Kingdom mean to us? Is it valuable enough to us that we consider it worth staying awake for? Jesus frequently tells us throughout the gospel records to be watching and if we truly value and love our Lord and Master we will obey his command.

But surely this obedience is not something we would find onerous. It is for our ultimate good. It is a command born out of love, it should be a joy to follow the Lord Jesus and his example. To encourage us we have a glorious view in the scriptures of the earth at that time when the Kingdom is established. In Isaiah we have many word pictures of the Kingdom age, for example:

"Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." Isaiah 35:4

That is our trust, our hope, that God will indeed save us, therefore let us be strong, let us hold fast to the end, for Yahweh's words will never fail! The chapter continues

"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs." Isaiah 35:5-7

No need for a national health service, no need to fear disability. No more will the earth be desolate and famine strike. But apply this to spiritual matters and the vision becomes even more thrilling. No more will mankind stumble around, groping as a blind man to find some meaning to life, limping along striving to make some sense out of the world and the many troubles that beset us all. No, the eyes of the spiritually blind will be open; the knowledge of God's ways will set men truly free. The tongue shall be full of praise for our Creator and joy will fill the heart. Sorrow and sighing will flee away and this spiritually parched desert of life, will be full of bubbling fresh springs of the water of life.

"Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice for ever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. "Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. Isaiah 65:17-20

Such will be the contrast between the peace of the Kingdom age and life now, that our trials and sorrows will be but as a bad dream that vanishes when we awaken as the morning mist. It will be a time of renewal, a time of refreshing, a time of regeneration. We will indeed sing for joy at the wonder of the new creation! Once again the difference will be seen between the righteous and the unrighteous, the godly and the ungodly. God always hears the prayer of faith; He will bring peace and salvation.

"...they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD." Isaiah 65:23-25

No, there shall be no harm in that glorious age for sorrow and sighing shall flee away. The great Prince of Peace will rule in righteousness and we shall be with him!

1. A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
2. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—
3. and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears;
4. but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
5. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash round his waist.
6. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.
7. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
8. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest.
9. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."

Isaiah 11:1-9

We have been called according to God's mercy to be part of that nation of kings and priests, to His honour and glory. Of that city we are destined by God's grace to inherit, we read:

"You have come to mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the first born, whose names are **written** in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant" Hebrews 12:22.

Thus we shall be privileged to join in with that mighty throng singing "The song of Moses, the servant of God and the song of the Lamb" Revelation 15:3. We have so

much encouragement to keep us awake and striving to please our heavenly Father. We deserve nothing, yet have been offered everything, surely as the scripture say's "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb" Revelation 19:9.

One final quote that always gives so much comfort is found in Revelation 21:1-4. What a wonderful thought that the living God is willing to dwell with the righteous, to wipe the very tears from their eyes. This life is full of so much sorrow, so much sadness, but in contrast we have so much to look forward too.

The righteous are called, as the scriptures say's to be **FIRST BORN SONS OF THE LIVING GOD!** It is the Lord Jesus Christ who has made all these things possible, he who has redeemed us by his own great sacrifice. As John writes:

"This is how God showed his love among us, he sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him". John 4:9

And of Jesus it is written:

"Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends".

That is what we are called and privileged to be, His friends, if we obey His commandments. Therefore keep **AWAKE!** For if God loved us while we were yet sinners, how much more will we not be loved now we are reconciled to him through Jesus Christ.

Let us therefore diligently watch and pray for his coming, confessing our sin's before him and resolving do his will. Let us always keep in our mind's eye that wonderful and exhilarating view of the Kingdom age, for it will spur us on, keeping us spiritually alert and filled with the oil of the Word of our heavenly Father.

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