

DEFCON 3!

There were groanings no other man could fathom, sorrow intense enough to kill, sweat and blood mixed as the capillaries in his face burst. Perhaps all Satan's hellish demons assaulted his mind with lies, terrors and temptations. All it would take was one sin, one slight misstep, even just one thought pattern divergent from perfection and all would be lost – all mankind for all time.

You see, the Gethsemane trial was both a matter of whether or not Jesus would go to the cross and a matter of how, in what condition.

Nothing less than a perfect, spotless and blameless man could or would be accepted by the Father.

When the stakes are high, the dynamics of the spiritual warfare are really intense. Consequently, Christ's first command to the three sleepy disciples with Him was, "**Watch...**"

But on they slept and often, so do we. Many wonderful messages, books, radio programs and other ministries have highlighted our Christian concerns on love, joy, evangelism, giving, social and moral attitudes, prayer, worship, etc. But like a much needed 'wake-up' call, I'm realizing the lack of emphasis within the last days church overall on this very key scriptural command. In fact, I searched through a database of 40,000 sermons and found only one on this topic.

Now, to put it in perspective, the New Testament contains a startling number of commands (not

suggestions) to watch especially for the Lord – as many, if not more, as for loving, 2 ½ times more than for giving or praying, 10 times as many as for preaching or praising and 20 times as many as for worshipping. The Old Testament rarely deals with this concept of watching, but by contrast, nothing is commanded to the followers of Christ more often.

It is said by Bible scholars that when God repeats Himself, it is to make clear to us His emphatic intention or direction. In this case, we are given some 20 or so commands – how emphatic does the Lord need to be to get our attention?

Despite this, we are generally hard of hearing. It's as if these directives were never given or perhaps they were a mistake or simply unreasonable. And unfortunately, I'd dare say that the vast majority of Christians in our country on any given day rarely give thought to them let alone obey them.

So why would the Lord leave us with a command which He knew we would find 'unfulfilled' for 2000 years or so? Why keep watching for someone Who doesn't seem to come? The Thessalonian believers of the first century were so into it, they got very concerned when a false teacher led them to believe they'd missed Christ's appearing and the rapture.

Now, 2000 years of watching isn't much compared to eternity but I'm convinced that the Lord is completely in tune with how long it seems to us. So if the blessed event was to be considerably delayed from our perspective, why would he

say, "*Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming – in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning – lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:30-37) Wouldn't He know that some would become disheartened and some would even turn to mocking those who continued to obey?*

Is God being unreasonable here? or just toying with us? Is He having trouble returning? Why should we continue to watch? (or why begin?)

There are at least three purposes for watching: first, God is really in to testing our hearts. Remember the story of Abraham and Isaac? God told Abraham to do the unthinkable, the totally unreasonable (from our perspective) – to sacrifice His son, Isaac, to place a knife in the heart of the one person he loved most of all. How could He require such a thing?

It was a **test**.

Of course, God stopped him. But, even though Abraham believed God would raise Isaac from the dead, can you imagine the agony he was

experiencing? And when the Lord put a halt on, He said to Abraham, "...now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." (Genesis 22:12) A test.

In like manner, we have been given what some of us may think is an unreasonable command, yet God is examining our hearts. Will we watch?

Second, He not only tests, but He **trains** us to avoid evil. In Gethsemane, Jesus was accompanied most closely by Peter, James and John whom He instructed to pray. An hour later, finding them asleep, He said, "Why do you sleep? Watch and pray lest you enter into temptation."

You see, there is a definite spiritual strength associated with watching that trains our hearts to eschew sin. If or when we leave off watching, our relationship with Christ wanes and we can even find the world again becoming attractive and enticing. In His parable lesson of Math 24:45-51, Jesus warned that those who believe that the Master is delaying His coming can find themselves "beating" their brethren and drinking with drunkards.

Third, there'll soon be **transfiguration** and **translation** for the command is indeed sincere – it's no game, no toying and no difficulty for the Lord. The fulfillment is absolutely real. Yes, He's coming friends! When we see Him, we will be changed (1Cor 15:52) and snatched up. (1Thes 4:17). And those who have longed for Him, who have looked for Him to appear will have an exceedingly excellent

reward. Paul wrote, "...there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but to all who have loved His appearing. (2 Tim 4:7,8) You see, that's the essence of watching for the Lord – love.

So Christ gave the commands to test our hearts, to train them and ultimately to transfigure and translate us into His presence. Consequently, I want to watch, but how? Do I need to down lots of coffee? Clothespins for my eyelids? No, it's not a physical deal, really. It's spiritual. Watching simply means to be spiritually circumspect, discerning and ALERT as opposed to sleepy and complacent. Furthermore, it means keeping 'an eye on the sky'. Nevertheless, though it's straightforward, it goes against our grain.

Our sin nature is to sleep. Oh, not to cut Z's in the physical sense, what I mean is that it is a delight to our flesh for our inner man to sleep, to nod-off, to schnooze, that is, to let the sin nature govern our thinking and conduct. In fact, it often seems that the fleshly part of our being is continually singing lullabies if you would.

But, watching is that condition in which we are on high alert – DEFCON 3. When we really care and really believe -- intensely so -- we watch. It's not an anxious thing, not at all. But it is eager. Watching reflects a state of readiness, desire and confidence.

"And what I say, said Jesus, I say unto all: Watch. There is something very sobering in those words, something very pithy. The Lord

says, It all comes down to just one word. What is a Christian to do whose hope is on Christ? What is a Christian to do in every circumstance of his life, in every age, and every day? Watch! Be alert! Be ready! Stand consciously before the Son of Man." –Rev. Carl Haak

Now, if you're like me, you'll probably realize that there have been times when you were really pretty 'drowsy'. Much of the church has been sleeping and Christ knew it would happen. In Matthew 25, in speaking of the last days, He says, "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins (you know the story)...but while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming, go out to meet him!'"

That's what's happening right now, folks. It's midnight so to speak, and the signs of the times are proclaiming, "The Bridegroom is coming!" And, "...now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed." (Romans 13:11) Let's discern the lying lullabies of the enemy, trim our lamps and arise.