

Studying to Be Quiet

I Thessalonians 4:11, 12

The Final Gathering of the Church

I Thessalonians 4:13-18

Watching for Christ's Return

I Thessalonians 5:1-6

No Room for Mary's Firstborn

Luke 2:7

Great Is Thy Faithfulness!

Lamentations 3:22



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December 3, 2017 — No. 3905

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Reformed Witness Hour

(www.reformedwitnesshour.org)

Station Listings

| Station | Location | Frequency | Time/day |
|---------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| KARI | Blaine, WA..... | 550AM..... | 8:00 P.M./Sunday |
| WPFG | Carlisle, PA..... | 91.3FM..... | 8:00 A.M./Sunday |
| WYLL | Chicago, IL..... | 1160AM..... | 4:00 P.M./Sunday |
| KLTT | Denver, CO..... | 670AM..... | 1:30 P.M./Sunday |
| WFDL | Fond Du Lac, WI..... | 1170AM..... | 8:00 A.M./Sunday |
| WFUR | Grand Rapids, MI..... | 102.9FM..... | 8:00 A.M./Sunday |
| WFUR | Grand Rapids, MI..... | 1570AM, 92.9FM ... | 4:00 P.M./Sunday |
| Adonai | Islip, NY..... | 540FM..... | 8:00 A.M./Sunday |
| KGCE-LP | Modesto, CA..... | 107.9FM..... | 6:30 A.M./Sunday 12:30P.M./Sunday 2:00A.M./Monday |
| KTAC | Moses Lake, WA..... | 93.9FM..... | 5:00 P.M./Sunday |
| KCWN | Pella, IA..... | 99.9FM..... | 3:30 P.M./Sunday |
| KLOH | Pipestone, MN..... | 1050AM..... | 8:00 A.M./Sunday |
| WORD | Pittsburgh, PA..... | 101.5FM..... | 10:00 A.M./Sunday |
| KPRO | Riverside, CA..... | 1570AM..... | 11:30 A.M./Sunday |
| KDCR | Sioux Center, IA..... | 88.5FM..... | 5:00 P.M./Sunday |
| KTRW | Spokane, WA..... | 630AM..... | 9:30 A.M./Sunday |
| KSPO | Spokane, WA..... | 106.5FM..... | 5:00 P.M./Sunday |
| KGDN | Tri-Cities Walla Walla, OR..... | 101.3FM..... | 5:00 P.M./Sunday |
| KTBI | Wenatchee/Moses Lake, WA..... | 810AM..... | 5:00 P.M./Sunday |
| KYAK | Yakima, WA..... | 930AM..... | 5:00 P.M./Sunday |
| UK | | | |
| GOSPEL | Northern Ireland..... | 846AM..... | 8:30 A.M./Sunday |
| Canada | | | |
| CKNX | Wingham, ON..... | 920 AM..... | 7:00 A.M./Sunday |

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

December 3, 2017
No. 3909

Studying to Be Quiet
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction

Last broadcast we considered God's Word as it touched upon our life of holiness. We found that holiness requires of us freedom from fornication and a call to sexual purity. In verse 9 of I Thessalonians 4 Paul turns to another subject: he speaks of love for the brother. This means the verses we study in our broadcast today stand intimately connected with the call to love the brother.

We consider verses 11, 12. We read, "And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing." These verses are a part of Paul's exhortation to grow in brotherly love. In verse 10 begins his exhortation: "but we beseech you brethren that ye increase more and more [in brotherly love] *and* that ye study to be quiet," and so on. There definitely is a connection in Paul's mind between the love of the brother and the need to do one's own business and to work. That connection is this:

to labor diligently while minding our own business is itself showing love to the neighbor. That is true both with respect to the neighbor *within* the church and to the neighbor *without*. Out of love for those around us we mind our own business, work diligently, and walk decently with our neighbor. In this way we fulfill the second table of the law. So, we bear that in mind today.

Also, we need to bear in mind that we have before us a very practical Word of God. We are studying that part of Paul's letter dealing with many practical truths of the Christian life. Although this Word of God is rooted in doctrinal truth, nevertheless, this passage is almost exclusively practical in nature. Yet, it is important instruction nonetheless simply because it shows us that we cannot separate our lives into parts. What we believe of God, sin, and salvation in Christ has everything to do with how we live. Even in what we may think is the most trivial or insignificant areas of our lives.

STUDYING TO BE QUIET I. *The Meaning*

Though every true church of Jesus Christ has its strengths for which she can be commended, it is equally true that she has her weaknesses. This was true of the church in Thessalonica as well. As far as brotherly love was concerned, this congregation excelled in it. But there was a problem that was yet in seed form, a problem just beginning to show itself in the life of some of the members of this congregation. No doubt Timothy detected this when he returned to Thessalonica to enquire into her spiritual needs. There were some who had the notion that Christ's second coming was close at hand. And if this were true, they need no longer busy themselves with their earthly labors. They were better off spending their time in spiritual pursuits in order to be prepared when Christ came for them. This notion probably arose in connection with the preaching of Paul while he was there on his second journey. No doubt, Paul preached about this great truth of Christ's second coming, emphasizing that we must always live in consciousness of that coming. Paul probably spoke of Christ coming soon and swiftly, as a thief in the night. And though Paul himself had no mistaken notion concerning Christ's coming, there were those in Thessalonica who did. They were beginning to think that Christ might return to-

morrow or the day after—or at least very soon. They thought it best therefore to quit their daily labors and spend the short time they had left in preparation for the coming of Christ. Paul addresses this problem in some detail in the second epistle. The problem was not as prominent with the writing of this first epistle as it was when Paul wrote the second one. Yet, as we mentioned, the problem was already beginning to surface in Thessalonica prior to the writing of this first letter. Evidently it was a big enough problem already to warrant the writing of the passage we consider. This, then, is the reason Paul enjoins the saints in Thessalonica to study to be quiet.

Now, we might be quick to think that this Word of God no longer applies to the church today. It was for a young church who was as yet immature in her faith and knowledge of Christ's coming. The church today is mature in her knowledge. Therefore, the instruction of our text is really of no value to us. If that is our reasoning at this point, it is faulty. Our text addresses itself to the church today. It condemns those today too who have the mistaken notion of Christ's imminent, unexpected return—those who are deceived into thinking that Christ is coming on a certain day and therefore sell all that they have and spend their time

that is true! It has been true throughout this old year. God has preserved us in our own lives too. Look at our individual sins, people of God! The sins of our hearts—the secret sins that no one else knows about. How often God has shown His mercy and forgiven us—again and again and again. We cannot begin to list the times we have received forgiveness from our faithful God.

God has done this in the midst of our afflictions too. How often would not our struggles with sickness, age, infirmities, and the pressures of life consume us! But God in these too always upholds us with His strong right arm. He never leaves us or forsakes us! We are His people, the sheep of His pasture. He cares for us and leads us. Maybe the way He leads us is not known. Maybe it is hard. He does not promise us that it will not be a difficult way, but He does promise that He will be with us every step of the way. And that is what we have witnessed this past year again.

Certainly we can confess with Jeremiah that God's mercies and compassions fail not, that they are new every morning. What a wonder that Jeremiah in all his affliction and pains and sorrows could confess

that! But how he experienced that in life too. Just as we have in this past year.

III. Praise

It is the end of 2017. We stand on the very eve of a new year once again. Time like an ever-rolling stream. It seems as if this year has just begun...and now it is over already! We have seen our share of joys and we have seen our share of sorrows and burdens. But we do not stand here discouraged! We have bright hope for tomorrow. Jesus comes. Neither do we stand on this last day of the year with sorrow. We do not look at 2017 through negative eyes. We look at it knowing that God has again been faithful! What a wonderful God we have! How good He has been to us again.

What then shall we say tonight? "Great is Thy faithfulness, O God, my Father!" I will lay my head on my pillow tonight and when I awake it will be another year, a new year. But as I close my eyes upon the old year, that hymn will be in my heart and on my lips: Great is Thy faithfulness! That is our confession today. No, that is our song of praise to God! All praise and glory be to God in this year gone by. Lord God, we extol Thee—and not ourselves. Great is Thy faithfulness!

God reaches down in His mercy and draws us out of the misery of sin and gives unto us the joy of salvation in Christ. He does that over and over again!

This is how God's mercies in with His compassion. God's compassion is His love—but it is His love from the point of view of God's affection toward us. He is a God who is kindly affectioned toward you and me and therefore a God of tenderness, a God of kindness. He is filled with benevolence toward us His children in Christ. That is a beautiful picture of God that our text draws for us. Believers are those whom God has chosen from all eternity. He has loved us with an eternal love in Christ. That love does not change. He does not despise us one minute and love us the next. He does not in anger over our sins seek revenge on us, though we deserve it. But God is compassionate towards us—always and ever. And in that compassion God shows to us His mercy. It is a tender mercy! In His faithfulness to you and me God is gracious towards us, loves us, and is merciful towards us. In this past year all of these were revealed by God to you and me in our lives. How grateful we can be tonight. God's mercies and compassions fail not!

Notice that these words, mercy and compassion, are in the plural. Jeremiah speaks of

God's mercies and His compassions! He does this because he has in mind the different acts of mercy and compassion God has shown us in our lives. In this past year God has shown to His people countless acts of compassion and mercy. These have not failed us. God shows that to the faithful church of Jesus Christ. The church has been preserved in the faith in this past year. God has given His people, yet, the truth of His Word. And He has given them the desire to hear that truth as it is revealed in the Scriptures. He has worked in them faithful adherence to that truth.

God has not failed His people in their homes and families in this past year either! If we were left to ourselves, there too we would be consumed. We sin within our own homes and families. Sins that are not made known to others perhaps, but are there nonetheless. But God's mercy and compassion have not failed us there either! They are, in fact, new to us every morning. Every day anew we witness God's unfailing faithfulness towards us, His people! Instead of leaving you and me in our sin and watching us fall, God pities us every day anew and preserves us in our generations. Despite the weaknesses found even in believing households, even in believing parents and children, God upholds them in His great love and mercy. Every day anew

in idleness waiting for Christ's return. These verses definitely condemn such foolish persons, and they instruct them to be busy with their own business and to labor.

But this Word of God applies to all of the church. Others in the church today, for one reason or another, refuse to labor, and as a result they meddle in others' business. These members of the church do not take seriously their calling to support their household. They do not take heed to the instruction of God's Word that a man must labor diligently in order to make a living for himself and the members of his family and church. As a result, they do not prepare themselves properly for a job that will be able to support family and church; neither when the time comes to fulfill this calling do they perform it. God places a serious responsibility upon the head of the home: he must labor with his hands or his mind or both in order that he might lack nothing for himself or the church. Our love for God and the neighbor, our calling and place within God's kingdom, apply to this aspect of our lives. You see, sometimes we like to divide our lives into compartments, it seems. This compartment belongs to my spiritual life. This one belongs to my earthly, secular life. What belongs to the spiritual I deal with spiritually, but what

belongs to this secular aspect of my life, well, it has nothing to do with what I believe. It belongs to earthly business, earthly labor, and has nothing at all to do with my spiritual life. That is not true! Everything, everything we do—and that as far as life and business are concerned too—everything must be controlled by what we believe. Our lives cannot be divided up into various compartments. Our spiritual life and the Word of God, even in such practical matters as seeking work and supporting a family, must guide and direct our actions. This is why Paul instructs as he does in the passage before us: "Study to be quiet!"

That is a unique phrase, "study to be quiet." In fact, it is a very descriptive phrase. It is given us to counteract all slothfulness and laziness. "Study to be quiet!" The term "quiet" here is to be applied to all of life in general, the way we conduct our lives in this world. The idea, then, would be to lead a quiet and peaceable life, a life that is even and smooth. Actually, this is a picturesque term here. It draws the picture of a person quietly and calmly conducting himself in relation to others. One who is untroubled with quarrels and upheavals in relation to those about him. A quiet life is a simple and private life unencumbered with strife and tumult. A person who leads

a quiet life is one who goes to work each day and returns home again routinely. His life at home is also characterized by serenity, where wife and children live peaceably with each other. This is one who is quiet. And we are enjoined by the Word of God to *study* to be quiet.

Now, that does not mean, of course, that we should go out and buy all kinds of books in order that we might study them in order to learn how to lead a quiet life. The term “study,” rather, implies concentrating on living a quiet and peaceable life, striving earnestly in all we do and say to lead a quiet life. In fact, the term literally means “to be ambitious.” We as God’s people must ambitiously strive to walk in such a way that our lives in our homes and in our dealing with others are not busy and loud, but calm and even.

This graphically portrays our lives as God’s people in this world. It is over against this that we must examine our lives as well. How would we judge our own personal lives and that of our families when comparing ourselves to this Word of God? How busy are we in matters that really do not belong to us? How often do we find time to sit down in quietness and peace with ourselves and our families? How gentle and quiet are we in our dealings with others in the church and outside the church?

Are we always pushing and shoving to be heard and noticed, always finding ourselves examining the lives of others?

II. *The Manner*

Paul describes for us the manner in which we can accomplish studying to be quiet in verse 11. Notice: “that ye study to be quiet *and to do your own business.*” The conjunction “and” in our text would be better translated “even.” Then our text would read: “that ye study to be quiet, *even* to do your own business and to work with your own hands.” In other words, the sense here is that Paul further explains how to study to be quiet. The first of these ways is to do or tend to our own business. When we do our own business, we are studying to lead a quiet and peaceable life. Paul refers to the affairs of life in general. Each of us is called by God’s Word here to do that which is peculiar and proper for our lives in particular without meddling in the affairs of others. Or, to use the words of Paul himself in I Corinthians 7, “let every man abide in the calling wherein he is called.” We are called to attend to the business of our own lives without thrusting ourselves into the lives of other individuals and families. We may not under the pretense of affection and care take upon ourselves to man-

with age, we struggle with infirmities and illness. It all has been there in this past year. But one thing is certain for us as believers who stand now in the last hours of this last day of 2017: God has been faithful! He has not suffered our foot to be moved. He has not allowed us to fall away from faith, even though we deserved it. He has held us in the palm of

His mighty hand and He preserves us. And in those times when we were about ready to give up even crying out in despair, then God has born us up. He never leaves us. We experience His presence! And when we suffer for righteousness’ sake, then God also gives us a calm reassurance that it is well with our soul! Such is the faithfulness of God toward us.

II. *Mercy*

This faithfulness is revealed to us in what Jeremiah says in verse 22 and the beginning of verse 23: “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning.” Again, as we reflect on this past year we truly can say that God has been both merciful and compassionate toward us. God’s

mercy is His attitude of grace and love toward His elect people in Christ, by which He takes pity on us in the misery of our sin. If there is anything that stands before the heart of a believer on this last day of the year it is his

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own unworthiness before God. We have transgressed God’s commandments every day. We have not loved Him as we should, and

we have not loved our neighbor as we should either. When we look at our sin, we see our guilt before God. We deserve to be consumed in God’s justice. We deserve to be punished for sin—eternally. But we are not. And we are not because of God’s mercy. God has chosen us in His great love for us from eternity. He has called us to be a people unto Himself in this world. Yet, He knows our sins, our human frailty. He also sees what a tangled mess that we can make for ourselves—and that we have made for ourselves again in this year gone by. We wallow about in the misery that sin causes us. He knows we are not happy there. He knows that when we sin we make ourselves miserable in life. God pities us when He sees us in our sin. He feels sorry for us and what has become of us in Adam! In that pity for us

their lives. But they believe! They believe that God will never leave or forsake them—*because of what Christ has done for them!* In Christ God’s faithfulness is revealed to you and me, fellow saints! We believe that! We believe that Christ has died to deliver us from sin, and that He has taken away our guilt. We believe that God views us ever in Christ alone. For Christ’s sake, therefore, we are preserved in our lives. For Christ’s sake you and I have been preserved in our faith in the past year.

In this last day of the year, therefore, we hold fast, we cling tenaciously, to God’s covenant promise to us. And we rejoice in the name of our God: He is Jehovah, the faithful one! Look at the events of 2017. Look at society. In this past year it has become more lawless. Almost every week or so we hear of a mass shooting. Abortion, adultery, rebellion are the order of the day. Immorality abounds. A couple of generations ago our children ran and played outside with all the neighbors with no fear of kidnapping. Now every parent has to sit outside with his children to make sure no one steals them away. Our society has become an unsafe place in which to live. There is the constant threat of war, for example, from ISIS or North Ko-

rea. We read of terrorist strikes in this world, something from which our own country is not exempt. There is corruption in big business affecting the lives of thousands. There is lack of financial security.

This same lack of security is found in many churches of today. The error in all its various, sometimes subtle, forms that places man above God. There is the attitude of tolerance toward sin. There is a growing attitude of anger and resentment toward the church that strives to maintain the Word of God. Apostasy and an ungodly lifestyle prevail in the church as a whole. When we review the year that is past, we can at times verge on the point of despair. Where is this world going?

But God has been faithful to His people, has He not? It is not as if we have not stumbled in this year that is past. Every person has his own personal struggle with sin. This year has not been wholly one of joy and happiness for us. We must deal with sin as it has entered into our own relationships. We must deal with sin in those whom we love. Sin causes strife! Besides, we must deal with a sin-cursed earth in which we find sickness and even death. We struggle

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age the business of others. In other words, Paul means what he says: “Mind your own business!” That, first of all, is the way to a quiet and peaceable life: mind your own business!

Well, this Word of God comes to us today! We are called not to be busybodies in other people’s affairs. This is a timely admonition! In our present society we are so, so susceptible to falling into this sin. And sin it is, a sin that can oftentimes cause much disruption in our lives and the lives of others, disturbing our quietness and theirs. We in our present society are more susceptible to this sin, more than any other society, past or present. I say that because of the modern technology of our day. In today’s world it is easy to be busybodies in other people’s matters. We have all our modern conveniences that make life simple. Chores that took a full day to do in the past now take up but an hour or so of our time. The result is, first of all, that we have more *time* to become involved in all sorts of matters other than our own lives and work. The affairs of life and labor can be dealt with in short order, leaving us with time for becoming involved in business that does not belong to our own personal life and labors.

We also have the modern means of communication. Ev-

eryone has a cell phone—and, with this, almost everyone is linked to one or more types of social media. We keep up with the lives of hundreds of people—believers and unbelievers—closely scrutinizing and examining what they are doing with their lives. In turn, so many openly share their every move and their every thought and desire with the hundreds that are tuned into their lives. Social media has made the whole lot busybodies in other people’s lives. With no prick of conscience, they ignore the injunction of God’s Word, “mind your own business,” and heartily make everyone else’s business their own. With that not only comes the *knowledge* of what goes on in other people’s business, but also the *judgments* that we make. We judge the right and wrong of matters that are none of our business—judgments that we freely pass along to others. The result is tumult and confusion, anger and strife, upset and upheaval.

All that as opposed to those things that make for peace and quiet in our lives and in the church. There is one sure way to study to be quiet in our lives: mind our *own* business. We must consume our lives in our own affairs and the affairs of our families. Forget about the hot news that is circulating out there! We must be busy with our daily labors in the workplace and in the home. We must be

busy with our own husbands and wives and children.

The other way in which we study to be quiet in our lives is by working with our own hands. Here our text focuses on the problem with some in the Thessalonian church: they were idle. Under the pretense of waiting for Christ's return they became idle, and idleness breeds meddling in the affairs of others. When we have so much time on our hands, then it becomes so easy and tempting to enter into the affairs of another's life. When we are slothful, when we are idle, when we are lazy, then the temptation is there—let us face it—to turn our attention to the lives of others. And that is when we get ourselves into trouble. We have heard it often enough and it is true: idle hands are the tools of the devil. When we are idle, not keeping ourselves busy, Satan is there, and he directs us into the way of backbiting and gossip. This causes dissension and unrest in the church and in our personal lives as well. That is reality. To counteract that reality, Paul says "work with your hands."

Now, he is not instructing us here to become manual laborers, as if manual labor, working only

with the hands, is the only cure for idleness. It probably was true that many of the members in the Thessalonian church were common laborers or skilled artisans. They worked with their hands. They did not spend their time in a study as I do, or in the office of a professional as many others do by occupation. This is probably why Paul uses the type of language that he does. Nevertheless, this Word of God applies to all who labor. In other words, the simple command of God's Word is: work! Work hard and busily. Then, when you are not at work, go home where you and your family can share a few hours together before retiring. Be busy in your labors so that you will not have

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the time to become busy with other people's business. Besides, we must work because this is our calling in life. Man is called to labor by the sweat of his face. God does not intend us to be idle. God told man to replenish the earth and subdue it, having dominion over all things. Man must therefore "pray and work," as the common Latin proverb tells us. Pray and work. God did not place man in this world to spend his days in fun and recreation. God has placed us here to work!

He will never leave or forsake His saints chosen from eternity in His unchangeable will and called to be His people in this world. In other words, God swears an oath to us, His church: "By My name, I will never leave you or forsake you!" We must understand all of this if we are truly going to understand God's faithfulness! Because, you see, God's faithfulness speaks of His constant and abiding adherence to the oath that He swears to us. That God does not forsake His people is not because of anything they have done to deserve this. If it were not for God's faithfulness towards us, we would be consumed, you and I! "I am Jehovah, the unchangeable One, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed," God tells us in Malachi. But God is faithful to you and me because of who He is and because of the oath He swears to us.

This oath God has kept throughout all ages. Oh, it is true too that God pruned many out of His covenant and church. There is no doubt about it that God even cut off the nation of Israel and Judah as a whole. But this took place only because the wicked far outnumbered the righteous. These nations slowly, through the course of time, became filled with unbelievers instead of believers. They still looked at themselves as the people of Jehovah. They still boasted of that. But they were

not looking in faith for the coming Messiah. The sacrifices they offered were merely outward oblations and nothing more. This is what happened with Judah in the time of Jeremiah. There may have been a few yet who looked for salvation, but the vast majority of the people in Judah lived in unbelief and sin. While boasting that they were the people of God, they lived in the same sins—even worse—that the wicked nations around them did. God prunes individuals from the vine of His church and covenant when they walk in disobedience and sin. And when a church institute itself is filled with wickedness (as was Judah), God cuts out of the vine of His covenant the institute as well. *But*, this does not mean that God is not faithful to His covenant with His elect people who live in faith.

The elect, who are characterized by faith, are always preserved by God's almighty hand. God's promise is always to His chosen people in Christ: "I will not leave you. I will not forsake you in your needs. I am your Father, and you are my children, whom I love with an eternal, unchangeable love!" God's people in every generation hear that promise and cling to it! They need to, because believers know their own sin and their own failures in this life. They know that they do not deserve this favor and love of God in

today using the confession of praise raised in our text.

GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS!

I. Faithfulness

As we look back across the year 2017 in retrospect, we certainly can confess together God's faithfulness to His people in Christ. When we in our weakness have so often strayed from God, He has again in His faithfulness towards us preserved us in our faith. Even in those times when we were the least deserving of it, God held us in His mighty hand and led us. But we must understand what is fully implied in this concept of God's faithfulness if we are really to understand its beauty. Only when we fully understand everything that is included in God's faithfulness towards us are we able to stand on this old year's night and exclaim: "*Great is thy faithfulness!*"

You see, from eternity God has established His decree. In that decree He has chosen a certain people unto Himself in Christ. God did not leave that choosing up to man. He is God, who determines all things. God chose to Himself out of the human race a certain number of individuals who together would make up His church—the body of Christ in this world. As these individuals are born throughout the generations of this world, God, by His sovereign and free

grace, calls them to faith and repentance. He sends forth the Spirit of Christ into their hearts and works in them faith with its fruit: true repentance over sin. He then unites them to the body of Christ in this world, so that they stand together in this world with other elect believers, the church. With these believers in their generations God establishes His covenant with its promises. God enters into an intimate bond of love and fellowship with them, a bond in which He becomes their God and Father and they His people, the very children of His family. That is God's covenant.

With that covenant God has made a promise to His church, and through her to every believer. We read of that promise of God's covenant in Deuteronomy 31:8: "the Lord, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed." God speaks these words repeatedly to His people in the Bible. In His great love toward His people, in His covenant blessing toward them, God makes a promise to them: no matter in what way I lead you in this world, you need never fear, because I will never leave you alone. I will always be there for you. God's covenant, established long ago with Abraham, is accompanied repeatedly through history with His oath. God swears by His name that

III. The Purpose

In what will this result? What will be accomplished by all this? What is the purpose in studying to be quiet? Why work? Verse 12: "that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without." Of course, when we labor diligently, when we mind our own business, when we are quiet and peaceable, looking well to the ways of our household, we will be a witness to those who are without. Do not forget, the wicked are watching God's people. These are those who are without—those outside the realm of the church, those who are unbelievers. They watch us as Christians! When we lead a quiet life, minding the affairs of our station and calling in life, and working diligently, they see us. Our walk is honest, that is, "in good form." Our walk causes no offense.

And that leaves them an example to follow. Is that not true? When we are busy with our own matters and working with our own hands, then no one can raise his eyebrows at us. No one can question our integrity. Instead, they see peace and orderliness in our lives. Even ungodly neighbors will say: "Now that is a nice family." We leave a godly witness in our lives that the Spirit of our risen Lord dwells in us and is guiding us into an understanding of our calling and life in this world.

The other purpose for studying to be quiet and to work with our own hands is that of proper provision. We labor diligently, minding our own business and working with our own hands in order that we might take care of our responsibilities. In this way we have lack of nothing. And we have that which is necessary to give to kingdom causes as well.

By accomplishing all this from a practical point of view as far as our labors are concerned, we serve God rightly. That is what we ought never to forget. Everything we have considered today is not just some good practical advice the Scriptures give us. All this belongs to the life of holiness and sanctification that characterizes the believer. All this flows out of our faith in Jesus Christ. Just as fleeing fornication, putting aside all cheating and defrauding, and loving the brother are a part of our sanctification, so also do living a life honestly and working with our hands the things that are good belong to a life of holiness. Such holiness is in turn the fruit of the precious work our Savior has performed for His people on the cross. Let us study to be quiet—ever looking for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us labor with our hands, doing our own business. In this way we abound and overflow in brotherly love.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

*December 10, 2017 The Final Gathering of the Church
No. 3910 Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction

What will happen when Jesus comes again? The apostle Paul answers that question for us in part in I Thessalonians 4:13-18. We read there:

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

In these verses Paul is not

interested in all the events surrounding Christ's second coming. Rather, he concentrates his attention on those events that surround the gathering in of the elect church. He does not focus on the destruction of the creation or even the resurrection of the wicked in that day. Paul intends to answer one question: how will God through Christ gather His church to Himself in that day. The reason for this is to comfort the hearts of the saints in Thessalonica—and our hearts today.

You see, because the saints in Thessalonica were ignorant of the final resurrection, they mourned the death of their loved ones. The saints thought that their loved ones would in no way be able to participate in the victory and glory of the final gathering in of the church because they had died. They were dead and buried, never to see in their bodies the great day of the Lord. So Paul, in order to comfort God's people, instructs them in the blessed truth of the final resurrection. Not only those who are alive and remain in the earth are going to be present when Christ returns.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

*December 31, 2017 Great Is Thy Faithfulness!
No. 3913 Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction

On this last day of the old year we are going to consider together a lamentation of the prophet Jeremiah. To lament means to mourn aloud with grief or to express one's complaint. And this is exactly what the prophet Jeremiah does in this chapter and in this book of the Bible. He mourns over the desolation and destruction that had befallen Jerusalem and Judah. He raises his voice of grief over the captivity into which this nation had been taken on account of her apostasy. In verse 14 of Lamentations 3 Jeremiah informs us that he was a derision to all his people and that they mocked him with their song. This was true, and more. He was even cast into a pit, for days standing in mud up to his knees. This prophet had been beaten and imprisoned because he spoke the words Jehovah had placed upon his lips. He spoke words of condemnation and destruction upon Judah for the sins she had been committing before the face of God. The people and the rulers hated him for that. Not that Jeremiah took pleasure in speaking such harsh

words. He was required to do so by God Himself. He could not help but speak these words. He was Jehovah's mouthpiece. So he was persecuted for the sake of the truth—and in the book of Lamentations he raises his lamentation to God.

But why consider a lamentation at the end of this year? Because in the midst of his mourning, Jeremiah brings to mind a blessed truth that gives God's people joy on this last day of the year. That truth is contained in Lamentations 3:22-23: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." These verses teach us this blessed truth: God is faithful! In this past year God has proved Himself faithful to His people. Even though we see society and the church slowly crumbling and falling apart, we can say: God is faithful! His mercies toward you and me have been new every morning of this year gone by! That knowledge gives us confidence and joy as we stand at the close of this year and look back across the year. It is that confidence we consider

in Romans 3:11, “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.” Or again in Romans 8:7, “The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God neither indeed can be.” There is no ability in man to seek after God, to seek after salvation, to seek after Christ. He is enslaved to sin and unbelief in such a way that he cannot understand his spiritual plight. This is why John writes that when Christ, who is the light, came into this world, then men loved darkness rather than light. They did not want Christ. There is no room in the heart of man for Christ. This is what Christ's lowly birth points to.

But then how is it possible that you and I come before God today with believing hearts? How is it possible for us to read this account before us and believe in what is being told us this morning—if there is no room in any man's heart for Christ. Because, fellow believers, Christ Himself has made that room in our hearts. By means of the work of Christ on the cross we have been given to believe. It is a work of God's grace that we have come to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. The Spirit of our risen Lord has opened our hearts and revealed to us all these things. Christ has removed through His death the hardness of heart, He has taken away our blindness, and He has given us hearts that

believe and understand. Now we see and believe.

III. The Joy

This in turn gives us great joy, which shall be to all peoples. Really. Is there joy in our hearts in this time of the year because of the presents and parties? Everyone, even the unbelievers, find some earthly satisfaction and joy in these. Oh, there is nothing wrong with these things in themselves. But they really have nothing to do with the joy that the believer has in his heart. The real and lasting joy is this: for unto us is born this day in Bethlehem a child who is Christ the Lord. Our joy is found in the Savior who was born to deliver us from our sin. That is a joy that we have today. That is a joy that is ours every day. In that we celebrate: Christ the Savior is born. Hallelujah! We celebrate that in this time of year, but also all year through.

In that joy we go to the manger and we bow as did the shepherds. We bow because before us lies the light of the nations! Before us lies the King of kings and Lord of lords who even now has entered into the heavens and reigns over all. Before us lies the promised Messiah, who is Christ the Lord. We worship at His footstool. And hail Him as our King. We thank God for the joy of salvation He has freely given us.

Not only *they* will be a part of the gathering of the church. But the entire church will be present in that day—even the saints who have died and whose bodies are long gone. When Christ returns, then His shout will go forth and the dead in Christ shall rise, their bodies reunited with their souls, and they will be taken with all God's saints to heaven. Such is the fact of that great and notable day. All God's people, those living when Christ comes and those who have died, will all participate in the gathering in of the church.

We can be assured of this because Christ Himself arose from the dead. Jesus Christ has through His death and resurrection gained the power to raise us from the dead. Through His death and resurrection, He has gained the power and right to raise all His people from the dead. He is the resurrection and the life. Because we are *in* Him by a true and living faith, His resurrection becomes the power unto our final resurrection. Therefore, we need not fear that any of God's saints will miss out on the great glory and wonder of that day. Christ will indeed receive us unto Himself, that where He is, there we will be also. That is God's purpose in the gathering in of the church. That purpose He will fulfill. And so we shall ever be with the Lord.

But what will be the order

of events in that day? Paul very simply lays this out for us in the verses we consider today.

THE FINAL GATHERING OF THE CHURCH

I. The Manner

What will happen when Christ returns? What will be the order of events in that day? As clear as Paul is in the verses before us, we must bear in mind that there will be much happening in that final day of Christ's return. To attempt to order each element exactly and understand just how all these events could possibly happen is difficult. This is true because in that day time will be swallowed up in eternity. It is hard to understand the order of events when speaking of eternity. Nevertheless, the events involved in the gathering in of the church in our text are clear enough. Christ shall literally return to the earth even as He went up. When Christ ascended into heaven, He did so by merely floating up into the sky and disappearing. While the disciples were still staring after Him, two angels appeared and made this promise: “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come *in like manner* as ye have seen him go into heaven.”

When Christ returns, therefore, instead of seeing Him *ascending into* heaven we will see Him *descending from* heaven. Paul also teaches us that in

verse 16 of our text, the very first part: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven.” Jesus Himself tells us that when all the events of that day begin to transpire, then we should look up, cast our eyes to heaven, because it is from heaven that our redemption comes. The miracle of that day, of course, is that when Christ descends, all the world will see Him. His coming will shine as the lightning from the east unto the west, and every eye shall behold that coming. This means that when Christ returns He will not come to stand in a particular place or locale on the earth itself. If Christ were to return, let us say, to a particular city or mountain on the earth, it would be impossible for every eye to behold Christ. Paul specifically teaches us in verse 17 that the saints will be gathered to be caught up together in the clouds to meet Christ “*in the air*.” The picture implied in these words is that Christ shall descend from the heavens and remain at a point in the skies where all will be able to behold His presence. Already this, of course, implies a miracle beyond all human comprehension. But it was never Christ’s intention to come back to dwell on this earth. Christ will stand in the clouds of the air, the very place where He was taken up into heaven, and from there He will gather His people unto Himself.

Three signs will accompany

the return of Christ to gather His people unto Himself. These signs will be three sounds we shall hear: a great shout, the voice of the archangel, and the sound of a trumpet blowing. Now, before going into these individually, we must understand the significance of them. These sounds herald the ingathering of the church! They are the clarion call to the elect saints to assemble, to be gathered together unto the final and glorious unification of the church of Jesus Christ! Believers confess that we belong to the church catholic, that is, universal—a church gathered from all ages and from all nations of the earth. But in this life, this confession is only an object of faith. We do not see with our eyes the entire church. We cannot behold the church as she is gathered from all over the world. Neither can we behold the church of the past, which has gone on before us. But in that final day, when these sounds are heard, it is unto the gathering together of all the church. That this is the significance of these signs is evident from Old Testament history. In Numbers 10 we learn that Moses ordered two beautiful silver trumpets to be fashioned. The first three verses of Numbers 10 teach us that the particular purpose of these trumpets was to call the people of Israel together unto an assembly. And the instruction of this chapter in Numbers does

phrase of our text also appears to those who read this Word of God in faith. It points to the truth that there is never any room for Jesus in the hearts or in the lives of men.

Again the question may arise: “But where does this verse *say* that? You are pulling things out of your hat here.” It is true the verse we consider here in Luke 2:7 does not say that “there was no room in the inn” means that there is never any room in the heart of man for Jesus. Neither can we say that the reason the innkeeper did not want Mary and her baby in his inn is because he did not want Jesus. He did not know that Mary was carrying in her womb at that point the long-awaited Messiah. He did not consciously in this act reject the Christ. To read this into this verse is saying more than it intends to say. What we have here in the birth of Christ, however, is a sign—that is all, a sign. The angels who announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds said this about Jesus’ lowly birth in verse 12: “And this *shall be a sign unto you*; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.” The angels speak of the verse we are considering as a sign. That there was no room for Jesus in the inn is a sign. Of what is this a sign? The answer is found in this: it is a sign that Jesus Christ, even in His birth, was rejected of men. John

explains in his gospel account, chapter 1:11: “Christ came unto his own, and his own received him not.” Or again in John 3:19, “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

Wicked man, who is lost in his unbelief, does not want Christ. And he does not want Christ because he sees no need of salvation from sin. He sees no need for salvation from sin because he does not see himself as a sinner in need of deliverance. Fallen man is lost in his pride! Unbelieving man views his sins as mere misjudgments, mistakes, or confusion on his part. He believes there is no need for deliverance from the bondage and guilt of sin because he refuses to see himself as in bondage to sin and guilty of sin. If placed before the choice therefore of whether he wants to continue in his life of sin or to acknowledge his sin and find salvation in Jesus Christ, fallen man will always choose the former. This is true because apart from salvation in Christ man is totally given over to unbelief. His eyes are blinded, so that he cannot even see the things of the kingdom of God. His will is in bondage to sin. He is unable to will the good or seek after the good. He will not seek after Christ. Fallen man is totally depraved. As Paul writes

to punish anyone other than a man for the sins that man commits. Christ as a man was able to represent His people at the bar of God's justice and pay the penalty for their sins. So, it was important that Christ was born of Mary. But it is equally important that Christ be God, because man himself would not be able to bear the punishment of God's eternal wrath against sin. He would be crushed under the burden of God's heavy wrath. If Christ were merely a man, then that would have happened to him too. Then He would not have been able to bestow on us what He earned for us on the cross. He would still be in hell right now, attempting to pay the price for our sins. But Christ is the divine Son of God. He is eternal and all-powerful. Because Christ was divine, He was able to pay the eternal price for sin. The human nature of Christ leaned upon, depended upon, His divine nature to hold it up, to sustain it in order that Christ might indeed die, then live again, to bestow on others what He earned on the cross. This is what we see in the Word of God before us today! Mary brought forth her firstborn son. In this way God made possible

our salvation. God's people always rejoice in that wonder of God's grace: Christ was sent by God to be born of a woman to deliver us who were lost in sin.

II. *The Reason*

That is one fact this passage of God's Word teaches us about the birth of Christ. Do you see it? Do you understand it? If you and I do, then we must realize that it

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is only by God's grace that we do. Unbelief shakes its head in disbelief at what you and I are able to glean out of this passage of God's Word. You and I are able to understand the blessed gospel only because the Holy Spirit has revealed it unto us. It is hidden from the eyes of those who walk in unbelief. God reveals the things of God's kingdom only to those who bow before Him in childlike faith.

There is more in this short verse of the Bible that we can see with the eyes of faith too. The reason Christ was born in a cattle stall is that there was no room for Joseph, Mary, and their baby in the inn. That is what is meant here by "them." It refers to Joseph, Mary, and their soon-to-be-born baby. The spiritual significance of this

not stop there. We also learn that, when the children of Israel were called to break camp in order to move to another place, a familiar shout went forth. Still another shout went up when the nation settled into their new place. In this instance, too, we find that this shout reminded Israel that God was leading her to the promised land. Now, at the end of time, these same signs accompany the gathering in of the church of Jesus Christ.

First of all, we read that a shout will be heard. Literally, this term "shout" means "command." A command will be heard. That command will proceed out of the mouth of Jesus Christ Himself. It will be an effectual command that will set the events of this final gathering in of the church in motion. It is a twofold command. The shout will be heard, "awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead!" This effectual shout will cause the dead in Christ to rise from their graves. But that shout of Christ shall also be the command to His angels to go out and gather together from all the earth the saints yet alive and waiting. This latter task of gathering the then-living saints, we learn from Scripture, will be fulfilled by the angels. We learn from Matthew 24:31, "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from

one end of heaven to the other." This explains as well why the voice of the archangel will be heard in the day of Christ's return. An archangel is an angel of higher rank among the angels—probably of highest rank. This archangel will take charge of sending out the angels in an organized manner to gather together all the saints unto the assembling of the church. As we have noticed already, the sound of the trumpet will be a summons to the church. When it is heard, all the saints will be waiting—even preparing themselves unto the great assembly of the saints in heaven. These are the signs, then, that accompany the coming of Christ from heaven to the earth.

There is more. There will be a certain orderly way that the saints are gathered. We are told in verse 16 of our text that the dead in Christ shall rise first, and then we which are alive and remain will be gathered afterwards. We read in verse 15 of the verses we consider, "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep." Actually, the term "prevent" here has the sense of "to precede." "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep." In other words, the gathering in of the dead in Christ (those in

Christ who have fallen asleep in death) shall *precede* the gathering in of those that are alive yet at Christ's coming. Again, although this is all so hard to understand because all these events are rushing in upon themselves, evidently the order of events would go something like this. When Christ's shout goes forth with the sound of the trumpet, the dead in Christ shall rise from the dead and be gathered with Christ in the air where He performs His work. At the same time the angels are sent out to do their work. These angels gather the saints still living. "Then," Paul writes in verse 17, "we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." In this way, God will bring through Jesus and with Jesus both those who are dead in Christ and those alive unto His coming to be with Him forever in heaven. These are the events of that day.

Now, this explanation of these few verses is simple enough. Easy to understand. But some twist the words of Paul here to say something entirely different. We must be aware of this error. Those who err twist these verses to prove their theory of several different comings of Christ before the end. They claim that Paul is not explaining events, all of

which take place on the day of Christ's return at the end of time. Verse 16, they say, speaks of the dead in Christ rising *first*. That is Christ's first return and the first resurrection. Verse 17 begins, "Then [and notice that word 'then'] we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them." That word "then" refers to another time, some years later, when Christ shall return again to raise up those who are living on the earth. At least two resurrections and at least two comings of Christ are taught here by Paul, they claim.

It is not my intention today to enter into polemics with this entire error. The question we need to answer is this: is what the premillennialist contends a proper explanation of the Word of God we consider today?

In the first place, it is improper to assume something about the Word of God here that is not taught. Paul is explaining to the saints in Thessalonica the events of Christ's second coming. He lays out logically the order of those events. There is no good reason to interject a lengthy period of time before verses 16 and 17. Such an interpretation forces this Word of God to say something that it simply does not say! Besides, even the sentence structure of these two verses does not allow

firstborn son. That is significant in itself! Again, the unbelieving world will say that there is nothing so significant in this. Here was a young married woman who simply gave birth to her first child, that is all. Many will even say that Mary possibly had other children before Christ was born. This was her firstborn son, but who knows whether Mary may have had a daughter waiting for her back in Nazareth. That is the nature of unbelief. Unbelief refuses to examine the testimony of Scripture, and, as a result, refuses to understand why the Bible at this point includes this word "firstborn" in its account.

Go back to Luke 1:26-38 and listen to the announcement of the angel to Mary. The angel appears to a young maiden who was a virgin—one who had never known a man—

one who was not married, though she was engaged. The angel tells this young maiden, in verse 31, "you shall conceive in your womb and bring forth a son." Mary believes, yet asks the question: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" To this the angel responds, in verse 35, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and

the power of the highest shall overshadow thee: therefore that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." What does that tell us about this child that Mary was to bring forth? This firstborn son of Mary was in fact the very Son of God. Do we understand the significance, then, of the little verse we consider today when it tells us that Mary brought forth her firstborn son? That teaches us who read this Word of God in faith that this baby Mary now brought forth into this world is the very Son of God made flesh. His conception and birth is a miracle of all miracles! We behold, in the face of this child in a manger, the very Son of God.

It was necessary that Mary's firstborn son be the divine Son of God. Without His being the eternal Son of God, salvation for you

and me is impossible. Oh, it was necessary that Christ be born of a woman too. We do not discount that today.

Christ had to be fully man. He had to be a human being just as we are. Man is the one who sinned against God, and it was man therefore who had to pay the price of his sin. God's justice demands that. How highly unjust it would be of God were He

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lineage to Bethlehem. The town was full. Yet Joseph, no doubt, had half expected that he would somehow be able to find a place in the inn. There had to be someone there who would take pity on Mary, his wife, who was about to give birth. But when Joseph inquired in the inn, he found that there was no room for them there. Even though the innkeeper could see that Mary needed shelter, he turned her away. There were others who had come, and would come, each with his own story and with his own reason why the innkeeper ought to make room for him in the inn. These too he would have to turn away. So Mary and Joseph could be no exception to that. We read at the end of the verse we consider, “there was no room for them in the inn.”

Joseph, realizing what condition Mary was in, had to seek out the best shelter that he could find for her. The only place he could find on short notice was a cattle stall. Nowhere are we actually told that it was a barn or a shed of sorts that became the shelter for Joseph and Mary. But it is in a barn that a manger is located. Where this cattle stall was located is mere speculation. Some say it was on the outskirts of Bethlehem, and from this they explain that there was not only no room for Christ in the inn, but no room for Christ in Bethlehem itself. Where this cattle stall was located,

however, we cannot say. But we can be sure that Mary gave birth to her son in the lowliest of conditions. While they were there in that cattle stall, the time was come that she should be delivered. So, there in that cattle stall she brought forth her firstborn son and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and then took Him and laid Him in a manger for His bed. Such is the simple, well-known account we are given in this verse.

Now, all of these events seem natural enough in themselves. Even the unbelieving world can believe these events. When unbelievers do, they see a whole series of sad events. But they do not look beyond these events to see what they mean. When we tell the Christmas story, we believe something special about the Christ-child. We believe that He was the long-promised Messiah. We believe that He is divine—the Son of God made flesh. We believe that this child was born into this world to accomplish the salvation of His chosen people. The wicked of this world believe none of this, and therefore, though some can and maybe even will relate the events of Christ’s birth, that is all they will relate. But, my fellow believers, look closely, beyond these mere outward events, and see what this account really teaches us.

Mary brought forth her

for that. Together they make up one sentence.

In the second place, forcing this passage in this way leads to an absurdity. Those taken up with Christ in His first return need to live for years in a place “in the air”? Where does the Bible teach of another spiritual place other than heaven or hell that is in the air? That is about as far-fetched as the doctrine of purgatory. Other arguments can be made too, but it is not possible to enter into them in the time we have left today.

Paul describes for us in the clearest terms what will take place in that great and notable day of Christ’s one and final return. God’s people yet alive and remaining will be taken to be with Christ in the air; the wicked will be left behind to be destroyed together with the earth. Then too, in that same day, after the destruction of the earth, the dead outside of Christ will be raised unto the just judgment of God and will be cast into everlasting perdition. God’s people will meet in the air Jesus Christ Himself and those whom Christ raised in the final resurrection of that last day. Once having met with these saints in the air where He was performing this final great miracle, Christ will take all of His saints together with Him to heaven and there shall they ever be with the Lord. This Word of

God provides for God’s people of every age unspeakable comfort!

II. The Comfort

Let us not forget that our text is practical in nature. It is meant to give comfort to God’s people. When they properly understand the events of the day of Christ’s coming, then God’s people do receive such comfort. This is why Paul states at the end of these verses, “Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” What words? The words we considered today. The dead in Christ shall rise and shall take part in the final gathering in of the church. God will indeed fulfill His purpose to take us to be with Christ in heaven. Our death will not prevent our waking at the end of time to the wonderful glory that awaits the church of Jesus Christ. The dead in Christ only sleep. How do these words provide comfort for us? In verse 14 Paul writes, “If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.”

Death and the grave are bitter enemies! Bitter enemies! They are harsh and hard because they rob us of our loved ones. They take away the fellowship and love we shared with them in this life. Death and the grave take from us companionship and leave us with loneliness and solitude. How we hate to

say our goodbyes when a loved one is slowly taken from us in death! How we hate it that we could not say goodbye when a loved one is snatched from us suddenly by the hand of death. And the grave: how final it seems. When the body of our loved one is left by the graveside we know we will never see him or her again. Many of us have experienced death in one way or another: a grandfather or grandmother taken away. A husband or a wife, a mother or a father. Maybe these were even taken from us while we are young. We know, do we not, that God can do this. Maybe death has claimed a child, an infant, or a teenager. Ah, how death can hurt! It is at that time in our lives that the words before us today provide for us the greatest of all comfort!

Someday we, together with our loved ones, will stand together before Jesus Christ. There will be no more death or the grave. These will have been finally conquered! We will stand body and soul alive, with each other, and all the saints. Our parting at death is only temporary—only for a short time. It is a mere closing of our eyes in sleep to be opened again to live forever! Death and the grave actually serve us, by transforming our vile and earthly bodies into that which is glorious and spiritual! It is with this hope that we lay our loved ones to rest

in the grave. Do we mourn? O yes, we mourn! Sometimes we cry our hearts and souls out! We miss our loved ones and the fellowship and love we shared with them in this life. But when we mourn we do not do so even as the unbeliever who has no hope! We have great hope: we will see our loved ones again and will share together in the gathering in of the saints. We will live again! I know we cannot always see that hope when we are consumed in sorrow. But we are led to that hope through the comfort of our fellow saints. “Comfort one another with these words!” And we do. We all take turns doing that, do we not? When another member of the church of Christ passes away, we are there to embrace our fellow saints and to remind them of the hope of the final resurrection! And we comfort them with our fellowship and love!

This comfort causes us to suffer silently. Quietly we rest assured in the final resurrection and gathering in of the church. We look forward to that day and patiently long for it! And our souls are comforted! What a glorious day that shall be, when my Jesus comes for me! What great rejoicing will be ours! Be still my soul and wait on the Lord! Christ comes again! With uplifted head I long for that coming! I pray for it! Then is when we shall be saved. And we shall ever be with the Lord!

village, had come to Bethlehem to register. As a result, that city was packed with people.

Certainly no one had his eye on Joseph and Mary. They were but another couple who were making their way to Bethlehem according to the command of Caesar Augustus. They were of the house and lineage of David and therefore they too were coming to register for this taxation. In our broadcast today our eyes of faith are focused on this young couple because we know that out of Mary would come forth that King whose birth we rejoice in. We look to see the birth of the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, who was soon to be born exactly in the place it was prophesied of. It was upon their entering into Bethlehem that the words of Luke 2:7 unfold: “And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.” We examine this verse for a few moments today.

NO ROOM FOR MARY’S FIRSTBORN

I. *The Meaning*

We consider a fact today that seems normal enough in itself: Mary brought forth her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes. Mary and Joseph were poor peasants from the village of Nazareth in the region of Galilee. They did not

have money to buy expensive clothing. That they wrapped their newborn son in swaddling clothes was not sad to them. They had brought these swaddling clothes with them, no doubt. Certainly, they were not clothes that could be found in the cattle stall where Jesus was born. These were long linen strips used by the poor to wrap their newborn babies. This was not a strange occurrence therefore—that a woman gave birth to a baby and wrapped him in linen clothing. But *the place* where Mary and Joseph gave birth to their baby is indeed a strange one. We learn that, after their baby was born, they laid him in a manger. A manger? Why, that was a feeding trough out of which animals ate. A manger is found in a barn or a stable. Why would Jesus be laid in a manger for a bed? That certainly is strange! To understand why this took place we have to consider the events that took place when Mary and Joseph finally reached the end of their journey in Bethlehem.

You see, upon entering this town they discovered what we were talking about earlier. The town was jammed with people. Houses had taken families in, and the one inn (which is a small hotel of sorts) was full. This was not unnatural either. It was to be expected. After all, there were many families in Israel that could trace their

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

*December 24, 2017
No. 3912*

*No Room for Mary's Firstborn
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction

Bethlehem was about as busy as it ever had been. The city was astir with people hurrying here and there attempting to accomplish their business. Houses were filled with people, and the little inn in the town was itself packed to capacity. The townspeople were certainly not used to this busyness—and they had a hard time accommodating everyone.

Why were all these people here? Was it because of the prophet Micah's prophecy? “And thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel”? Maybe everyone was here in Bethlehem on this particular night in order to look for the birth of the Messiah. The people of Israel should have known the Messiah was going to be born here. Maybe they were here to watch for Him? Maybe their eyes of faith were now glued to this village because they were anxiously awaiting the fulfillment of this prophecy? Surely, that had to be the reason Beth-

lehem was all astir! But it was not.

There was another reason—one not nearly so noble as this—why all these people were in Bethlehem. Faraway in a distant country there lived a great emperor. His name was Caesar Augustus. The empire he ruled over had conquered much of the then-known world. This included the Palestine area. Long before this, this great empire, called the Roman Empire, had subdued the Jews and placed them under tribute. Now, Caesar Augustus and his senators had decided to levy a tax throughout the empire. In order to do this all the world had, first of all, to register for the tax. The actual taxing would not take place until later. But now, in Palestine anyway, the way chosen for the Jews to register for this tax was by going to the town of their lineage. This is the reason so many people were in Bethlehem at this particular time—it was time to register for the tax. All those who were of the house and lineage of David, as well as many other families who could trace their lineage to this

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

*December 17, 2017
No. 3911*

*Watching for Christ's Return
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction

Paul is teaching the saints in the church of Thessalonica about the second coming of Christ. We learned of that in our last broadcast. Today we will study briefly I Thessalonians 5:1-6. Paul writes in these verses,

But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

In our last broadcast we considered the events of that final day when Christ appeared. The verses we studied then taught us *how* Christ would come. The passage we study today teaches

when Christ comes. Christ comes again as He promised. But when will Christ come? That is a pertinent question. Paul had just explained to the saints of Thessalonica about those who were alive and remaining when Christ came. Did this mean Christ was coming in their lifetime? Obviously not! Can we say that Christ is coming in our lifetime? Can we say Christ is coming in the lifetime of our children or our grandchildren?

“Of the times and seasons ye have no need that I write unto you, for yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night!” This is what Paul writes at the outset of the verses we consider today. Paul then proceeds to give us instruction concerning the time of Christ's appearance. With it he gives us practical instruction of our need to watch for that coming of Christ, right now in our lifetime!

**WATCHING FOR
CHRIST'S RETURN**

I. *A Thief in the Night*

The goodman of the house and his wife are ready to lay

themselves down to sleep. It is early evening, it is dark outside, and they must rise again at day-break to begin anew their day's labors. The goodman routinely checks the doors of the house to see that they are all bolted tight. Confident that the house is secure for the night he retires. He is confident that his house is safe, and he falls asleep thinking to himself peace and safety! But sometime in the night the thief, who knows his profession well, breaks into the man's house and steals away the goodman's wealth! He came swiftly, unexpectedly, and suddenly. No one was expecting him. Who was to know that the thief was coming? And who was to know in what watch of the night he was coming? So the goodman was caught totally unprepared. He was not watching, neither was he prepared. He was sleeping, and he lost his prized possessions. Such is the coming of the thief. He depends on the element of surprise! He comes when no one is expecting him. He descends upon the house suddenly and swiftly.

The Bible uses this figure in a number of places to describe the coming of Jesus Christ. Our text today does too. In verse 2 we read, "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." Throughout the verses we examine today the same figure is used in order to

instruct us concerning Christ's return. What does this earthly figure teach us concerning the spiritual truth of when Christ comes? The obvious meaning is: Christ's coming is going to be swift, sudden, and unexpected. This is true, first of all, from the point of view of the wicked world itself. This world will have fallen asleep just as the goodman of the house. Jesus tells us that, just as in the days of Noah, so also at the end of time, men will be going on with life as if this world will never end. They will be eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. Life will be going on as usual. The faithful church of Jesus Christ that keeps warning to watch for Christ's return will be mocked and ignored: "Where is the promise of his coming, for all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation!" From a spiritual point of view therefore, this world will have fallen asleep calmly and confidently! They will say to themselves: "Peace and safety!" Being soundly asleep from a spiritual point of view, this world will not be prepared for or even expecting the coming of the thief!

This is true as far as the time of Christ's coming as well. He comes at a time when we least expect it. He tells us He comes soon, and that He comes quickly, but just exactly *when* Christ is going to return no man knows!

quickly prepare myself so I am ready! There would be no need to ready myself now, every day anew. That is why Christ does not reveal the exact time of His coming. He does not want us to know! He does not want us to know, in order that right now, today and tomorrow and every day of our lives, we might prepare ourselves for that coming! He wants us to live every day of our lives as if He is coming tomorrow. We must always be prepared—always anticipating His return! And that in order that we might walk a holy life in this world!

God does not want His children to sleep. Those who sleep sleep in the night, in the darkness. We are children of the day and of the light. We may not sleep. In other words, we may not grow weary in our expectation of Christ's return. We must never become lethargic as far as our spiritual lives are concerned. We may not lay aside the fight of faith. We must not grow weary in the battle against sin and Satan. We must not close our eyes to the events that are going on around us and ignore them! We must not let our guard down as far as our battle against our enemies is concerned! We must live anti-thetically in this world and not build bridges between us and the ungodly wicked! Neither may we be drunk—spiritually

drunk! We may not become intoxicated with the pleasures and treasures of this present world! We may not consume ourselves in them so that we become worldly minded and lose sight of our home in glory. Our heads may not whirl with earthly luxuries and pleasures, that as a result we lose sight of the times and seasons! This world ends, and we must watch for that end.

This means that we must be sober, first of all. Our minds must be clear and bright. Our spiritual senses must be honed so that we watch the signs around us. We must read them correctly, too, in order to understand just when it is that the thief comes. Our lives must be filled with spiritual concerns. We must be busy in our study of God's Word, in worship and in prayer. All these means equip us to be sober and our eyesight keen. Then we will watch! We will stand in these last times with our eyes wide open and waiting. Every day, each day! The thief comes. Are you prepared to meet him when he comes? If the goodman is prepared, the thief will not catch him unawares. Are you prepared for Christ's coming? Can He come tomorrow and will you be ready to meet your Lord? Watch! He comes soon! Prepare! Then we will be ready when Jesus comes!

saving of a church unto glory, God will glorify Himself! He created all things for that reason. Man fell into sin for that reason. Christ has come for that reason. The church is defended, guided, and preserved for that reason. The end of the world will come for that reason. Every event in creation and history leads to that perfect end. We are given to know the times. We understand what the development of this world is all about.

We are also given to know the “seasons.” This term refers to certain fixed periods of time. We know the various fixed periods of time in this world. We know of the period of time before the flood. We know the period of time from the flood to Christ—the period of the old dispensation of God’s covenant. In God’s Word, believers are given to know perfectly the period of the new dispensation of God’s covenant—the season or period of time from Christ’s first appearance unto His second coming. We know as well what will indicate the close of this period of time. We will be watching all the signs that indicate that this season in God’s chronological time-clock is coming to a close. The Bible everywhere gives us signs that point us to the imminent return of Christ. We are given to know what will transpire in history before Christ returns. We watch these signs as they develop in

creation, in the nations, and in the church, in order that we might be prepared for the coming of the thief!

III. Watching for the Thief

Now you and I are given by God a command in the last part of verse 6: “Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.” This command is based upon the knowledge we have of Christ’s coming. It is based on the fact that we know He comes suddenly and unexpectedly, at a time when no man knows. Do not sleep, do not be drunken, but watch and be sober! Always be prepared, for we do not know in what watch of the night the thief will appear!

Ah, that is the very error of those who wish to predict a certain hour in which Christ comes! If I knew that the thief was going to come at 4:00 in the morning, then I need not worry for the rest of the night, just so I am ready at that particular time for him. If I knew exactly when the birth of my baby was going to take place (as some do today, of course), then I need not worry about the labor pains until that particular time. If I knew exactly the year, month, day, and hour that Christ will return, then I would have no reason to watch right now! All I would have to do is wait until that time and then rather hurriedly and

Not only is this idea established in the figure of a thief appearing suddenly in the night, but it is supported by another picture Paul uses in verse 3 of our text. We find there the picture of a woman in travail—a woman who is about to be delivered of a baby. The idea is that suddenly, without a clue, that first hard labor-pain hits. The woman has been expecting it all along—she knows it is close, but she does not know exactly when that first hard labor-pain will hit that will bring about the birth of her baby. Christ’s coming will be sudden and unexpected. He comes when this world believes that they have found their way, that they have found the answer to all the ills and problems of society. Christ comes when the kingdom of man in this world has established itself and is convinced that it is on the verge of establishing itself without God. At a time that no man can figure out, that no man will be able to determine or prophesy of, Christ will come. And that coming will not be quietly in rapture, but it will be a coming with shouts and trumpets, unto the destruction of the wicked of this world!

Now, it is important for us to realize the point Paul makes here before moving on. We have taken note of the fact that there was an error about Christ’s coming that prevailed in this church of Thessalonica. Many of the

saints there believed that Christ would come in their lifetime. In fact, some of them had even quit working and were idly waiting for Christ to return. The instruction here is meant to combat the error of those who think they know when Christ will return. Notice how Paul begins our text in verses 1 and 2, “of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord cometh.” Paul explains at the outset, “I really have no need to write to you about the time of Christ’s return because you know about it perfectly! What you know through my preaching and through the words of Christ Himself is that that day comes as a thief in the night! You cannot speculate about a particular time in which Christ returns! You cannot predict that Christ is going to come in your lifetime! It is not your job to predict that time! He comes as a thief! That is all that Christ Himself reveals to you! Now, it is your job to watch! No man knows the time of Christ’s return, just as no man knows the hour in which a thief will come to rob a house, or no man knows when that labor pain will strike to bring forth a baby!”

II. Prepared for the Thief

But having established this fact, Paul goes on to say this, in

verse 4: “But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.” Now, that is striking. Paul tells those who believe that the coming of Christ ought not to overtake them as a thief in the night. God’s people who in faith look for the second coming of Christ will be prepared for that thief when he strikes unexpectedly. We may not know in what watch of the night that thief comes, but nevertheless we are those who will be prepared for the coming of the thief! Christ comes as a thief, but we will not be as the wicked world who sleeps. We will be sitting there awake and watching for the thief, that he might not break in on us unprepared. All this is true because we know perfectly of Christ’s coming!

We ought not to overlook that perfect knowledge we have of Christ’s coming. That is not just a knowledge about some facts of Christ’s coming. It is not some kind of human deduction we have made for ourselves that Christ comes again. It is a *perfect* knowledge. It is the knowledge of faith—a knowledge that people of this world do not have of Christ’s coming. When the unbelieving man (inside the church as well as outside) is warned and instructed concerning the swift and sudden return of Christ, he does not believe. His reasoning is blinded by unbelief. He

knows, yet he does not know, that Christ comes again. He knows about it, but he does not believe it. And for that reason, too, Christ will come upon that unbelieving man suddenly and unexpectedly. Christ’s coming will overtake him with sudden destruction! But God’s people have been given a perfect knowledge that Christ is coming. We know He comes soon and suddenly. And we by all means believe it! We may at times grow weary in watching, we may not at times be so alert, but we know perfectly that Christ is coming, and we believe that.

Paul emphasizes this blessed truth in verse 5, where he teaches that God’s people are children of the light and not children of the darkness. We were at one time, of course, when we were lost in our unbelief and sin. We too were children of darkness. Sin had its hold over our hearts, minds, souls, and body! Our hearts and minds were darkened to the truth. We lived in the night of sin! We could not nor did we desire to know God and the things of the kingdom of heaven. Of the times and seasons, we could not know because God had not revealed them to us. This is true of countless throngs of people today. Our world is lost in the darkness of sin and unbelief—these are the children of the night to whom Paul refers in verses 5-7. Those still stumbling about in their

unbelief, those whose hearts God has not opened, and whose hearts never will be opened, are the children of the night.

Yet, God is gracious is He not? He has proved that in our lives. He still proves that in the hearts and lives of many people yet today. He graciously has poured out into our hearts the light of salvation. He has laid the burden of our sin and unbelief on the shoulders of Christ. Christ carried away the burden of our sin on the cross. He earned there for God’s people the gift of faith. And included in that faith is the certain knowledge that Christ returns as a thief in the night! We are given to know and believe that the thief is coming and is coming soon and that we should be prepared! How thankful we can be for the light of the knowledge of God we have received in Christ Jesus! How blessed we are that God has sent forth the Spirit of Christ into our hearts, that He

might open our spiritual eyes and understanding! Now we know perfectly that Christ comes...soon, swiftly, unexpectedly! And we watch for Him! Carefully we keep our eyes open. We do not know what hour of the night He will return, but we are

prepared—we are watching!!

We know that the time of Christ’s return is getting very, very close! How do we know that Christ’s coming is getting very close? Because believers know the times and the seasons! God has revealed to them the times, first of all! The Greek term for “times” is used in our English word “chronology or chronological.” When we use that term even in our own language it refers to a sequence or succession of events that take place in time. If we put something in chronological order, we are putting it in the sequence of events in which it happened. What God’s Word here means, therefore, is that we are given to know perfectly the sequence of events as they take place in the history and development of this world. That is quite a thing, you know! Unbelieving man has been trying

*How blessed we are
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ing to find out the purpose of this world and its development since time began. He never has!

The believer has! He is given a knowledge and understanding of the order of events that take place in history. We know that all of history is ordered by God from eternity. We know that God has ordered all things in such a way that, through the