Matthew 24v44 **The hour that ye think not** 11/01/24

"*Therefore be ye ready for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh*"

All believers are commanded to watch. This is an express requirement personally enjoined upon them by the Lord Jesus Christ. Many who claim to follow him do not watch and have no idea what to watch for! They regard the signs of the times and the personal return of the Lord Jesus from heaven to earth, as an issue that is not in their orbit of concern, to them it is far more important to selfishly demand forgiveness for every transgression that they love to continue to engage in, dismissing the subject of Bible prophecy as "rummaging around in the rubbish bins". The approach to Bible prophecy is a subject which separates those who please Christ from those who do not.

How are the disciples to make themselves ready? They must ensure that their clothes are washed white in the blood of the lamb. This is not a one-time activity that can be achieved and then no longer considered. The scriptures are clear there is a continuing need to "*keep their garments*" Rev 16v15 this was emphasised in the context of watching! "*Behold I come as a thief, blessed is he that watched and keeps his garments lest he walk naked, and they see his shame*". There is a difference between watching and keeping their garments, but these are two strands of the necessary behaviours of those who wish to be found approved at the return of their Lord and master.

What then are the believers to watch for? "*The sign of the Son of man*" is stated as one of the important things to look for. Many people will have their own ideas as to what Jesus was referring to by using this phrase. However, there must be a degree of unity of mind over establishing what is meant by such statements. The signs of the times are mentioned more often and it is necessary for the Truth holders to be engaged in the consideration of these, which include

the various returns of Revelation 16 which all come together in the days of the sixth vial which begins with the drying up of the Euphratean power of the Muslim world which previously held sway over that area of the near east we know as the levant, the land promised to Abraham Isaac and Jacob, freed from that domination in modern times.

Earlier in the same chapter Christ taught that: *"No man know the day nor the hour, no not the angels of heaven….."* verse 36. This underlines the divine prerogative what God retains but has now revealed to the Son. It is not possible to discern on advance which day or hour it will be, however many have tried to precisely predict this significant event even down to the very time of day, let alone the actual year. When we look back upon these events we will probably say, that in retrospect with the benefit of hindsight it was quite determinable because all the evidence was there, in a similar way that the arrival of Jesus as the Messiah in his first mission was obvious, although few had a clue let alone an accurate understanding that was unshakeable, but living through such an experience is always different.

Trying to consider the era (that generation shall not pass away) of fulfilment rather than the year of fulfilment is closer to the perceived requirement. Endeavouring to determine the day and hour is going against explicit Bible teaching but many have so erred.

As weak and transient creatures we have a limitation in how we approach such matters. We tend to over think our own importance and the issues that loom large for us in each and every generation. All too often we neglect the generational approach and use a microscope rather than binoculars to view the forest that lies ahead! Every time someone makes a prediction this should be tested with the lens of a wider Biblical understanding of the unfolding of divine prophecy.

In this modern era of quick access to international news which can beguile us into thinking we are experts at world affairs, there is less excuse to investigate these matters for ourselves rather than merely rely on the opinion and input of others no matter how well respected. No believer will be able to say to Jesus that they watched another believer who watched for them, there must be no vicarious approach in any aspect of our religious practise. The Truth teaches representation not substitution in every detail of our understanding of such topics. This does not mean that the production of articles on the signs of the times in Bible magazines are preventing us from doing our own investigation of watching, but should therefore never be a end in themselves but rather a spur to activity to do our won work in this area. Do not limit your diet to regurgitated food others have already chewed for us! Each must ensure that they are personally watching!

What then of previous generations who were distanced from world news and events cocooned in their geographic setting away from the action of God's unfolding plan through the ages? How were they to watch? Have we ever considered the need for everyone to watch? Our understanding of how we watch must not be limited to watching in the era of the internet and television and radio, what of those who went before? Newspapers have largely been replaced but they would have been a way to absorb information for several centuries. Before that they would have been ways that international news circulated and was considered by those who wished to be informed. This is an abiding experience which our innate human curiosity has facilitated. Left to themselves the Truth holders would never be able to accumulate this information, but God has set up the earth to shield the woman in the wilderness and the remnant of the woman's seed, and their ability to watch would also have been catered for. Those nations who have removed themselves from the affairs of the Holy

Land and the career of Daniel's fourth best have done themselves and their people a grave disservice. Sub-Saharan Africa and China are two notable examples, each content to remain outside the orbit of Roman influence for their own selfish but humanly understandable reasons. Not only were they distant from the divine Revelation of the scriptures, but they were also distant from the arena of God's unfolding plan!

Those who would serve Christ must know what his commandments are. If they cannot even remember what he has said how will they even begin to obey him? In context what is the punishment for noncompliance? "*There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*". Weeping suggests the emotional breakdown of those who are declared guilty when they realise that because of laziness, selfishness and crass stupidity they passed up the opportunity of total forgiveness and eternal life with the most purely capable and compassionate man who has ever lived. Gnashing of teeth implies the seething anger of those who feel that they have been unjustly treated even though they will have been judged by the paragon of virtue in the Lord Jesus Christ who actually died for their sins!

Our verse teaches that the Truth holders will not be fully ready when Jesus does return lulled into a false sense of delay or further opportunity to have time to change into the people Christ is looking for but let us not be so deceived! When the cry goes up that the bridegroom cometh 25v6 the wise virgins need to be ready to trim their lamps not having time to go out then to acquire oil!

A Voice from the Altar Russel Noonan