

Revelation 16:14 For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather

them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

15 Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his

garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

BLESSED IS HE THAT WATCHETH

Brother Emerson A. Wilson

Armageddon

We already have studied about the three unclean spirits gathering people to a place of final showdown. We explained to you what Armageddon was and where it was found. In the Old Testament, the geographical location was the southern slope of Mount Carmel; it was a place of battles fought and victories won. Even so, my friend, these three unclean spirits are working today to bring people to a final showdown. It is called the great day of God Almighty because it will be a day of crisis.

This conflict has been going on since the Garden of Eden and is coming to a final conflict very, very quickly. The great day of God Almighty will be a day when the issues will be plainly determined. I definitely believe that God is pulling back the covers and driving away the fog which has clouded men's minds so that men can be awakened to what the issue really is. We are coming right up to a time when there is going to be a final showdown. There have been some other times in the Bible and in the Revelation when there was a showdown. Brother, when the devil gets uncovered to a great enough degree, we will feel his hand. Mark this down, before this conflict is over, before Jesus splits the clouds, the conflict will be brought to a crisis.

As we have previously studied,

Armageddon is not a literal battle; it is a battle of principles. The gathering of these unclean spirits is to gather you as an individual into a place where your life and the influence of your life goes out against God and the kingdom of God. The Spirit of God, on the other hand, is endeavoring to bring a people out where their influence stands for the kingdom of God, or where God can seal you, as the Revelation uses the language, with the Father's name in your forehead.

Every one of us who understands this Scripture knows that this battle is a daily one. We are in it every day; we don't get any days off from this battle. There is nobody on furlough or sick leave. This is a battle from which no one is discharged as long as he is here on the earth. The only means of discharge is death, if you are a Christian. If you are not a Christian, you don't get discharged from the battle when you die; you get into it, in a more heated stage than ever before. Whatever our deportment may be, whether we are in the home, on the job, on the street, we are in this battle daily. Even so, there is little to remind many of the fact that they are in a battle.

My friend, one of the great reminders is God's Word. Because the Word of God has not been preached as faithfully as it ought, too many people look to circumstances and say that we couldn't be in a battle. Friend, this is a deceptive battle.

You can be in it day by day and not realize what is really taking place. My friend, the only way you can know at the close of the day whether you have overcome and been victorious is by looking right into the mirror of God's Word. You can't look at circumstances and know whether you have been victorious. No, we are only victorious as the Word of God reveals the victory to us.

The very existence of such a battle is forgotten in too great a way in the daily rounds of life, and this is what the devil really wants. He wants us to get so taken up in the daily cares of life that we fail to realize and keep upon our minds daily that we are in a battle. When everything seems to be going well, you are in a battle. When you feel like you are blessed and that God is really holding you up, you are in a battle. Nine times out of ten, when the Lord is really blessing you is when you have to be more careful than at any other time. When you least feel a need to be careful is the very opportunity the devil is waiting for to make his approach and do his work.

My friend, we are quickly, being led to the great day of God Almighty—the final Judgment. This great day of God Almighty is the final Judgment, where the powers of evil will be physically shattered and destroyed right before man's eyes. We are heading toward that; every day puts us closer. The closer

we get, the more the devil is going to work in his deceptive ways. Just look out for more deception from here on out than we have seen up to this point.

If we make it through victoriously, my friend, it is going to take a greater prayer life. We just might as well commit ourselves to it. Victory is going to require more constant communion with God through prayer and the reading of God's Word. We must have daily strategy, daily understanding, daily help, daily life, and daily wisdom from the hand of God to make it through. Well, that really isn't difficult, not if you love God and love His Word.

A Christian's Weapons

We are coming up to a final showdown where the powers of evil are going to be shattered. Now, friend, the devil knows that. He believes it and trembles, and he is going to be on the move as never before. In the meantime, Christ said in the 15th verse: "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."

We read in Ephesians 6:12, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Now, here is the battle point: we are warring against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Second Corinthians 10:3-5 tells us: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations [or reasoning—here we begin to see that a great part of the battle is in the mind], and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

Here is where the battle is. If you

have been born again and have a knowledge of God, the enemy is out to spoil that knowledge. He is out to switch you over to a profession and cause you to lose the true knowledge of God that you have in your soul. How does he work? Through our reasoning and imagination, he begins to set up high things. Any time you have a thought contrary to God's Word and you hold on to it, you are exalting your thoughts against God's thoughts and His Word. Whenever the devil can get man to thinking that his thoughts are higher than God's thoughts, and turn down God's thoughts and go his way, the devil has worked a work.

If the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, what are they? The sword of the Spirit and prayer. There would not be so many people rising up against God, His Word, or His men if they would do more praying about it. Brother, if we ever get our minds clear and in the position that God wants them in, we must use the weapons of the Word of God and prayer.

Ephesians 6:1-18 tells us what our weapons are: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

"And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master

also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him. Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girded about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; Any your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all taking the shield of faith, where with ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

Watch and Pray

In Revelation 16:15 Jesus warned us: "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments . . ." This is an expression that Jesus used back in the Gospels when He said, "If the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched and would not have suffered his house to be broken up" (Matthew 24:43). Paul also used this expression, and in the Revelation it is used more than once.

False religion holds to the thought that He is coming as a thief to steal away the church and have a rapture and all those things. There is no truth in that teaching whatsoever, Anywhere the expression of Jesus coming as a thief is used in the Word, it simply means "at an unguarded hour."

The Bible says that when He comes, He will "appear"; the heavens and the earth will be on fire. No one will be asleep. No, everyone will be awake; and everyone will be taken to a final Judgment. When He says, "Behold, I come as a thief, Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments He merely is talking about this terribly disobedient age. It is an age when these frog spirits have been turned loose. They already have affected a good part of the religious world, and now they have centered their works on the true children of God. The devil wants our garments to become spotted.

Let's consider Revelation 3:1-3: "And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."

Sardis was one of the first locations where the Gospel was planted in Asia. She was an old congregation which had been a powerful congregation for God, but when Jesus sent the letter to her, He began to point out that hypocrisy was there. People were saying that they were alive, but they were spiritually dead. Not only had hypocrisy set in, but a lamentable decay in their religion was the sin that Jesus charged them with.

Consider the things He pointed out and compare how many of them are true among people who claim to be the people of God today. They had a name of life (the Church of God), but not the principles of life. There is a vast difference between saying you are a Christian and having the principles of Chris-

tianity in your life. It is very easy to raise your hand and say, "I am a Christian," but it is altogether different to live out the principles of a Christian life.

Verse 15 of our Scripture text says, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments . . ." As Jesus told the church at Sardis of their sad condition, He said, "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain . . ." The real cause of their sinful declension was that they had not watched. We are in this battle every day, and there is no time when you are awake when you don't have to watch. This easygoing religion that a lot of people are substituting for Christianity just isn't getting the job done. The Scriptures, over and over, instruct us to "watch" unto prayer. The Scriptures concerning our day and age deal with a lack of prayer.

Whenever we fail to keep watch, we lose ground. We must turn to our watchfulness against sin, Satan, or whatever is destructive to the life and the power of godliness. The keynote of the message is that He is coming as a thief; at an unguarded hour. Maybe He will come and take you singularly in death, at an hour you think not. My friend, you may not be having the least thought about your battle coming to a crisis, to an end, but it can all be over in a second of time.

Spiritual Declension

When Christ removes His gracious presence from a people, He comes to them in judgment. Christ only comes to you in one of two ways: He comes to you in graciousness, and if you spurn that, the only other way He comes to you is in judgment. His judicial presence will be very dreadful to those who have sinned away His gracious presence. His judicial approach, according to these Scriptures, to a dead, declining people will be surprising.

Why was Sardis surprised when Jesus finally came and took them off

the map? My friend, the very deadness of their experience kept them in false security, kept them from discerning His coming or preparing for it. When this spiritual deadness comes over people, there is a false security about them, and they are the last people in the world to get excited about anything spiritually. They can sit and sleep right under the preaching of the Word. When they are on fire, they are testifying, praying, and doing the things that go along with the fruit of a Christian experience. On the other hand, when this spiritual declension takes hold of them, you don't hear a thing out of them.

This is why Jesus says, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments . . ." These spirits are working on our individual experiences, symbolized by our garments. Brother, this battle brings us down to an individual state; we can't stand in groups or congregations. The congregation may be spiritual, but that doesn't help you a bit as an individual if you are not spiritual.

Revelation 3:17 shows the pitiful condition people can be left in when these unclean spirits get through with them: ". . . thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Every one of these letters is written to the pastors of the churches, and through them they were to be brought to the congregation. The reason more congregations are not getting the letters read to them is because they get hung up right in the ministry. History tells us before most of these congregations got in such a shape, before Jesus had to come and deal in judgment, Paul sent letters to them trying to awaken them, trying to get them to see their condition.

We read in Colossians 4:15-17: "Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house. And when this epistle is read among

you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea [if Laodicea had listened to this epistle, they would never have fallen under the judgment]. And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou halt received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it." What was causing Sardis to decline? Archippus wasn't fulfilling his ministry. There would be a spiritual fervency in many Church of God congregations if the ministry would be true to the call and true to the ministry of God's Word.

The Laodicean Spirit

Let us read Revelation 3:14-17: "And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

A look into history reveals that the riches this church boasted of were material riches. First of all, they certainly had not increased in spiritual riches. When they said they were rich, they were referring to spiritual riches, but they were looking at something else to make them feel they were spiritually rich. Spiritual pride and lukewarmness are produced many times by worldly prosperity.

It is only natural to want to prosper. If you have good, sound principles in your life, you will want to prosper. That is just as natural as wanting to stay clean, wanting a home, and wanting a companion. When prosperity comes, however, whether it comes in small amounts or great amounts, you have to be careful. You have to watch because

it can bring spiritual pride and work a deception to the place of making you feel you are spiritually rich when you are not.

It is not enough to contribute worldly goods and consider the task done. Laodicea had done that; their treasures were full, prosperity was good, and they had contributed much in worldly goods. There is a greater zeal needed than that. The greater the zeal in your experience, the less will be the inclination to rely on what you have already done.

Let's read Luke 18:9, "And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." These devilish spirits will switch you over from actually trusting in God to trusting in yourself. Here is an earmark of the Laodicean spirit—you trust in yourself that you are righteous and despise others. My friend, when this thing begins to work, the very fervent love of God for other people and a lost-and-dying world begins to cool and decline.

Let's read verses 10-12: "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." Another earmark of this Laodicean spirit is that you go to measuring yourself by others. The Pharisee (verse 11) threw himself in a funny position, didn't he? The Bible lets us know that all men are either sinners or saints, but he wasn't either one—he was a hypocrite.

A third mark of this spirit is that you begin resting on the things you do. There isn't any profit in any of the things you do; salvation is a gift. Certainly it is necessary to walk in the light of God's Word and obey it, but when you are definitely doing that in the right spirit, you will never try to rest on anything you have done. In any case, it isn't what

we can say that we have done; the question is whether or not we are like Jesus.

Jesus' inquiry of the church, in the light of the fact that He is coming again at any hour, is not "What have you done?" or "How much better are you than somebody else?" but "How much fire-tried gold—do you possess?" Anyone who studies the Scriptures knows that gold tried in the fire points you right to real faith and love. These Laodiceans were miserable and deserving pity. They were poor in the wealth which should have been accumulated in the zeal of God's work. They were rich in many other ways, but they were poor in the wealth that can be accumulated only by faithful service to God.

The Bible calls it laying up for yourselves a reward. There is no reward for salvation; it is a free gift. The reward comes from your faithful, zealous labor. When it came to that, the Laodiceans were poor. They were blind to the real condition of their spiritual safety. They were spiritually naked. They were without the cloak of charity, or the fervent love that would have covered them. According to 1 Corinthians 13, without divine love, we are nothing and we have nothing. If you will get the fervent charity, or the divine love of God, burning in your heart, it will produce zeal; it will produce faithfulness; it will produce watchfulness. It will produce all the other ingredients that it takes for you to live the standard and truly live for God.

We Can Be Ready

We read in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3: "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." When-

ever you allow the seeds of indifference, lukewarmness, carelessness, and apathy to be sown in your heart and mind by the devil, destruction will come. It is a fixed and settled law of God that no one is going to get around.

Verses 4-5 read: "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." Some people feel that all people will be surprised by His coming. Friend, He will never overtake us as a thief if we are ready. Jesus tells us in Luke 12:35, 36, and 38: "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants."

The Lord wants you to live with eternity in view; five every hour as though it might be the hour when the Lord will come. Have your house set in order. You may be of the job when a heart attack strikes you; there will be no time to go home and tell your wife that you are sorry for being grumpy that morning. There will be no time to go fix up anything. My friend, it is our privilege as children of the day to live every hour so that we are ready to welcome the Lord.

We read in 1 Thessalonians 5:6, "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." Again, Revelation 16:15 says, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments . . ." You have to get up and do something. Many times, we pray and God will reveal to us what we need to do, but the spirit of procrastination can cause us to put it off and fail to do God's will.

We are instructed in verses 6-7: "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be so-

ber. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night." There are two things on which Christians can become spiritually drunken. One is the cares of life. People get so carried away with the program of life that they fail to watch; they lose the real sober fact that Jesus could come this hour. Another thing we can become drunken on is the wine of Babylon's fornication. It makes you feel you belong to the church when you are not really a Christian. Let's stay sober.

Are You Willing to Pay the Price?

Paul said in verse 8, "But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation." Faith and love are the two things which will stand the fire; they will stand the trial.

Someone may say, "It sounds as though Paul didn't think he was saved. It sounds like he was hoping to be saved." No, sir. Paul taught all through the Book that salvation lies in three tenses: past, present, and future. You may have been saved in the past, you may be saved in the present, but whether or not you are saved in the end will be according to whether you endure unto the end. You can become careless about the future, so you need to put on a helmet to hold the mind with this thought: "I am not fully saved. I haven't attained. I am just on my way. God has done wonderful things for me, but all I have to do is become careless, and I can be lost in the end." So we need to put on a helmet of hope for salvation.

We read in Romans 5:5, "And hope maketh not ashamed: because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts . . ." If the love of God is burning in your heart and you keep it burning in your heart, you will make it through. The devil doesn't have enough traps to tear you down or destroy you. If you keep the love of God burning in your heart, thank

God, you will make it through.

While the unclean spirits are doing their work, the Holy Spirit is also doing His best to gather a people and seal them with the Father's name in their foreheads. We are coming right up to the great day of God Almighty, the final judgment. Jesus is saying, "Behold [consider, stop and think this over], I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." Jesus does not have an attitude of heart to want to embarrass us or to put us in a bad spot. As He pled with the church of Laodicea, He told her her true condition. He offered her the gold, if she was, willing to pay the price.

He has a real experience for you. You may have lost it, but He has it for you, if you are willing to pay, the price. If you will just repent, nobody will have to see your spiritual nakedness. Jesus deals with us individually, but if we refuse to repent, mark it down, your sin will find you out and your spiritual nakedness will come out before everybody.

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