



1 PETER 5:6-11 | Keep Careful Watch!

Sunday, May 17, 2015 — The Seventh Sunday of Easter

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

One of the more oft quoted phrases from Scripture is the Jesus' statement concerning sawdust and a plank of wood. I suppose it's natural. We don't like when people see our faults and failures. It's bothersome to us and certainly easy for us to put up a mirror and direct the criticism right back at someone. Other people like to put up blinders and ignore the actions of others around them. The Pilate-like Postmodern thought of "what is truth" runs rampant in our society, finding it's way into the psyche of nearly every American who doesn't want to "judge" one another. Other people put up the holier-than-thou face, looking up to heaven constantly praying for the second coming of Christ or praying that God would somehow give relief to their time of "suffering" at the hands of others.

If we step back for one moment this morning we'll see that all of these attitudes have one thing in common: the eyes. It's not a mistake or a happy coincidence, either. Many of the miracles Jesus performs deals with blindness. Many of the parables and teachings Jesus speaks about talks about seeing and watching. God refers to people who are ignorant of him and his will as "blind" far more than any other metaphor. And the Apostle Peter is no different. He commands us to keep a careful watch for the snares and traps of Satan. But he also encourages us to keep watch for the ascended Christ to return.

This past Thursday was the Church Festival of Ascension. It's a festival that is oft forgotten in the modern church. It falls on an inconvenient day of the week. It's usually in May or early June—prime time for soccer, softball, tennis, and track. The weather is usually beautiful and people are "tuckered" out from the chaos that is Holy Week and Easter. But in reality, the Ascension is one of the most important feasts of the Christian Church. For centuries Christians have gathered on the night before and the day of to celebrate Christ's return to heaven. It's the day when the Church praises God for fulfilling his promise of "setting all things under [Christ's] feet." (Ephesians 1:22) It's the day when the Church praises God for the Offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King.

It's the day when the Church recognizes the Great Commission it has to "make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28:19-20) In essence, it's the day that makes the church—well, the church.

So it's a little sad that the attendance at most congregations for Ascension is so low, including ours. Some might say, "At least we had a service!" True...many congregations today are forgoing the service on Thursday and simply celebrating it on the following Sunday. But that's the point of our children's devotion today and the point of Jesus' parables and teachings and the point of God's pointed words concerning eyes. We have our binoculars on, looking at other people and other churches, playing the, "At least we..." game. And all the while the waters of apathy and discontentment and spiritual sleep are wearing away at our own selves and congregations. Or, as Peter put it, Satan, the lion, is devouring us as we watch others willingly walk into the lion's den.

"Keep watch!" Peter says. It's not a suggestion. It's not a simply statement. In the Greek it's a command. A strong command. Do it. Be sure not to forget it. But we don't always do that. Perhaps we are the aforementioned church gazers, constantly worried and wondering what the other churches in the community are doing. Keep watch of your own possession! Perhaps we're navel-gazers, walking through life staring at our belly-buttons as people and opportunities pass us by. Keep watch! Perhaps we're the modern and "hip" Christian, ignoring what Christ says about sin and hell and instead preaching this touchy-feely idea of heaven and a Christian's life and the life you could have if only you believed in God strongly enough. Keep watch!

You see, dear Christian, Satan has us cornered. We often like to think that Satan is outside these walls, working his hypnotic spells to draw the "evil" world into his snares. But that's us looking through the wool that Satan has already pulled over our eyes. Satan already has the world. The world doesn't care about Christ. The world doesn't care about sin and grace. The world and its inhabitants—us!—are enemies of God. Every chance we get we make choices to defend our own agendas and plans and forget the plans and purposes of God. Our sinful conscience is even against us as it accuses us and makes us feel guilty about things that we shouldn't. It makes the good evil and the evil good. Really, Satan is right here, in this room, in your heads and minds, working feverishly to get you to trip up and sin against God.

Even worse is that when we do sin, Satan isn't there to pick us up. He's there laughing at how gullible we are, taking pleasure in the feast of a soul that he is about to devour. And yet how often do we go on thinking that we should do nothing about it? In Martin Luther's mighty hymn of the Reformation, he writes, "...one little word can fell him." (CW 200) God's Word! The Law. The Gospel. We're told that the word of God is "living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword." We know that the Word should be used to "teach, rebuke, correct, and train in righteousness." (2 Timothy 3:16,17) We know that the Law is good. But we hate to use it. Instead, we would rather sit back apathetically, falling for the guise of Satan's trick that we are being "loving," and watching our own lives or the life of a loved one simply fall apart.

So what can we do? How are we able to save ourselves from such dire straights? Nothing. We can't. By nature we are unable to do anything good. Every act, every word, every thought is

contrary to God. But God sent his Son, anyway. “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) What grace! What mercy! What love! That God would look at people who, by their very nature, hate him and planned to send his Son. But it was more than just sending Jesus. He didn’t just come down and live a good life as an example for us. He didn’t do this so that we would have some sort of measure to which to attain. No, God sent his Son to die. God sent his Son to take our sins, our apathy, our pride, our lack of concern for others, our guilt, our hostility, our shortcomings on himself. The perfect, sinless, righteous Son of God came to become guilty, sinful, and unrighteous in our place so that when God looks at us he no longer sees enemies, but sons and daughters—heirs of his kingdom.

But dear Christians, there’s more. Assurance that this is ours is found in the empty tomb. God raised Jesus from the dead for our justification—that is, he raised him from the grave as an act of approval of the work that was done. And now life in heaven is our hope. It’s not a hope as the world hopes—like a new bike or that we can go to Disney World. No, this hope is confidence. This hope is sure. This hope has its foundation in Christ.

And so now we keep watch for this Christ who has ascended. We keep watch with the Church as we wait for him to return to take us home with him. But as we watch there will be troubles and trials. As we wait there will be persecution and hardship. This is even more true for those faithful who continue to teach and preach God’s Law and Gospel. By all accounts those people will look like the losers the world thinks they are. “Blessed,” Jesus says, “are they who suffer on account of me.” (Matthew 5:10-12) So go to him in those times. Cast your anxieties on him. Find strength in him. Find comfort through him.

Dear Christians, keep watch. Be careful that you do not fall into the traps of the world, the devil, or your own sinful nature. And when you do—and you will!—look to Christ. Come to him with sorrowful and repentant hearts. Beg him for grace and mercy. Find forgiveness in him. Look to the cross and the empty tomb. See that those sins have been paid for. Know that life is yours in heaven. Then keep watch. For he is coming soon. Amen.



Soli Deo Gloria!

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