

MAKE GOD YOUR WATCHMAN!

Today's Text: (a) Ps. 121 (b) Ps. 127: 1-2

Extracts:

1. *He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore [Ps. 121: 2-8]*
2. *Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain [Ps. 127: 1b]*

*A prosperity-preaching church in Lagos, Nigeria, found itself the target of frequent burglaries on account of its expensive furnishing. The Church Committee met and decided to beef up security around the church building. They hired more night watchmen, popularly called **mai-guard** (from the Hausa language group in the Northern part of Nigeria noted for supplying most local watchmen). A few nights later, the burglars returned and cleared what was left in the church while the watchmen were fast asleep!*

*Most **mai-guard** come from the Moslem part of the country. To use unbelievers to guard the house of God sounds funny. However, the church people may have looked at the watchmen's skills. That is what most of us do! We spend a great deal of money to surround ourselves with security gadgets in the form of watchmen, extra locks and iron bars on our doors and windows, and insurance cover. We are now virtually living behind bars! Nations spend billions of dollars on their army and other protective services, and spend much more on weapons and military research. Politicians and leaders ride in bulletproof vehicles to protect themselves against potential assassins. However, on the day that it happens, those gadgets cannot work. With all its sophisticated intelligence and military arsenal, America could not prevent 9-11 (the attack of Al- Qaeda terrorists who crashed commercial planes into the New York World Trade Center twin towers and other famous sites in Washington, DC on 11 September 2001). Communist Russia and apartheid South Africa collapsed in spite of their awesome military surveillance power.*

*Instead of relying on fallible human methods, why don't we try a better way by making God our watchman? That is the subject that we shall examine in today's lesson. We shall use **Psalm 121** as our guide.*

1. Who is a watchman?

There is the story of a watchman who alerted his boss not to travel that day because, while he was on duty the night before, he had dreamt that his boss died in a car accident. The boss thanked him for the helpful message but fired him for sleeping on duty! Would you consider that boss harsh or ungrateful? Certainly not, because the watchman was hired for a specific duty, namely, to protect the organization's property. What if thieves came while the watchman was sleeping and dreaming? What if there were a fire outbreak and the watchman was too asleep to sound the fire alarm?

Watchmen (male or female) can be found in many places and in various forms. They are the *security guards* that we see in the shopping malls, at the gates of organizations or residential estates or in the grounds of wealthy people. They are in the state *security services*, such as the military, police, immigration and intelligence agencies. In some cases, *surveillance* gadgets, such as cameras and monitoring devices on the Internet, may supplement the work of human guards. In general, watchmen share the following characteristics:

a) *Their duty is to raise an alarm in the face of danger*

They are expected to be on the look out for danger and to alert the people they work for. God told Ezekiel [**Ezek. 33: 2,3, 4**]:

Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them: "When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman, when he sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his head."

Therefore, it is a very stressful job. Jesus asked sleepy Peter, James and John in the garden of Gethsemane, "What? Could you not watch with Me one hour?" [**Matt. 26: 40**] That is why watchmen are put on shifts so as to put variety in their work [**2 Kgs 11:4-7**] and to give them time to rest

b) *The power they exercise is not higher than that of the people they guard*

Watchmen tend to enjoy a much lower status than the people they guard. In fact, in most cases, watchmen may not have any information about what they are protecting for fear that they could collude with the enemy. The watchmen that we see in shops or schools or offices may not carry firearms, especially if they work for private organizations, some of whose owners may have the license to carry arms. On the other hand, policemen and the military carry guns because they work for the state, which may

have nuclear arsenal. In both cases, they are less armed than those they are guarding.

c) *Watchmen may look scary but they are actually scared!*

What do you think could be passing through the mind of a heavily armed and awe-inspiring American patrol officer on the streets of Baghdad late at night? What of the unarmed young graduate student serving as a security guard in the shopping mall of a dangerous neighbourhood? Why do you think that policemen blow loud sirens when they are pursuing armed criminals even when there is no obstructing traffic? Why do you think that watchmen tend to work in pairs (at least) or wear loud uniforms?

According to a Nigerian proverb, the uniform is just a piece of cloth sewn by a tailor! Therefore, the watchman's use of uniform is to hide his/her fear under the power that the uniform represents. For example, a US military officer and his Trinidad counterpart may wear uniform made from the same material but the American is likely to instill more fear in a potential intruder than his Trinidad & Tobago friend largely because of the comparative military strength of their respective countries. Deep down in his heart, the American could be a bigger coward than the Trinbagonian but his uniform covers that up!

d) *Ultimately, watchmen are not reliable*

No matter how vigilant they may be or how hard they may work, *ultimately* human beings, as watchmen cannot produce durable results. They may be able to alert us but they cannot defend us. An unarmed guard cannot stop an armed robber! An armed watchman who is a coward may flee before s(he) can alert those s(he) is guarding.

King Saul's bodyguard, Abner, was fast asleep when David came into the cave in the Wilderness of Ziph to take away the king's spear and jug of water [**1 Sam. 26: 1-11**]! Surveillance cameras recorded the movement of Al -Qaeda terrorists as they were boarding the planes that they later crashed into American buildings on 11 September 2001 but the human intelligence agencies were not alert or fast enough to interpret the pictures!

The lesson of it all is that man-made gadgets cannot keep watch over us. If we rely on them for our safety and security, we will fail woefully because "unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" [**Ps. 127: 1**].

2. God is the only reliable watchman!

Faced with the fallibility of the human watchman, the Psalmist exclaimed [**Ps. 121: 1**]:

I will lift up my eyes to the hills-from whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

In those days, it was fashionable to look up the hills in search of God because Moses and the prophets had done so. Later, after Solomon had built the temple in Jerusalem, worshippers believed that they could reach God there, as He had promised [**2 Chron. 7: 16**]. However, according to Jesus, “the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain [where Moses received the Ten Commandments] nor in Jerusalem [where Solomon built the temple] worship the Father... But the hour is coming and now is when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth... *God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must do so in spirit and in truth*” [**Jn 4: 21-24**].

Therefore, we now look *within us* to reach God when we become born again. That gives us access to ask Him to become our watchman. According to Psalm 121, here are the duties that God will perform as our watchman:

a) *Level of alertness*

He neither sleeps nor slumbers [**v.4**] and He is on duty “forevermore” [**v. 8**]. That is a significant difference compared to human guards. It means that our enemies will have no lapses to capitalize on. Any time they try to attack us, our Watchman is there as *Jehovah Shammah* [**Ezek. 48: 35**].

In the days of Elisha, the king of Syria planned to attack Israel. Every strategy he planned, God revealed it to the king of Israel through the prophet Elisha. The “man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, ‘Beware that you do not pass this place. For the Syrians are coming down there’” So, he would avoid the said place! It came to a stage that the king of Syria suspected that his servants were betraying him but “one of his servants said, ‘None, my lord, O king; *but Elisha the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom*’” [**2 Kgs 6: 8-12**]. Which human surveillance could have given such precise information to the king of Israel?

b) *Absolute protection*

Unlike human gadgets that can alert but cannot protect us from the enemies, God is our shade at our right hand and He will not allow the sun to strike us by day nor the moon by night [**Ps. 121: 5-6**]. Here, our great Watchman reveals Himself as *Jehovah Nissi*, our banner [**Ex. 17: 15**].

As the Egyptian troops pressed hard on the children of Israel by the Red Sea, the Angel of God moved behind to create a protective shield between them and the Egyptians. What followed? The pillar of cloud gave light to the children of Israel but gave total darkness to the Egyptians [Ex. 14: 19-20]. How can you attack what you cannot see? In deed, “he who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the *shadow of the Almighty*.” God becomes his refuge and fortress, the God that he can trust. He will no longer fear “the terror by night” nor “the arrow that flies by night” nor “the pestilence that walks in darkness” nor “the destruction that lays waste at noonday” [Ps. 91: 1-6].

Today, in Trinidad & Tobago, there is a call in some quarters for a limited state of emergency to deal with the menace of kidnappings, murders and other serious crimes. The Commissioner of Police has cancelled the annual leave of police officers and asked everyone to return to duty. Yet, the crisis is not abating. This situation is not unique to this country. In fact, the whole world is passing through turbulent times. No human effort can deal with the situation. Only God will be all -sufficient for these times. We need *Jehovah El-Shaddai* [Gen. 22:17] as our watchman!

c) *Journey mercies*

God as a watchman “shall preserve your going out and your coming in *from this time forth, and even forevermore*” [Ps. 121: 8]. This is a timely promise in the post-9/11 era.

Many people are scared to travel for fear of hijacking or crashes. Many people are scared to come out at night, go out to watch movies or enjoy a quiet dinner outside the home for fear of attacks from hoodlums. Is the house any safer? If you install heavy-duty security gadgets, all that the criminally minded would do is knock on your door and ask you to open it by yourself! If you are able or lucky to call 911 (or 990), the watchman on the other end may have been overworked to help. Recently, a 911 official fell asleep while recording a distress call. The caller heard loud snoring from the other end! When the matter was reported to the 911 authorities the next day, all that they promised was to reprimand the affected officer. It turned out that he had not rested for the last two days due to staff shortage!

Jacob and his twin brother, Esau, were sworn enemies because he had stolen Esau’s birthright. On his way back to Canaan after raising a large family in his father-in-law’s country, Syria, he had to pass through Esau’s territory, Edom, and he was scared to death! Jacob was so afraid and distressed that he prayed to God, “deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother; *for I fear him, lest he come to attack me and [my family]*.” But what happened? “Jacob went on his way, *and the angels of God met him*.”

When Jacob saw them, he said, ‘This is God’s camp.’” [Gen. 32: 1-11]. By the time that he and his brother finally met, “Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept” [Gen. 33: 4]. Amazing! Jacob’s Watchman, God Himself, had produced peace between two warring brothers. *Jehovah-Shalom* [Judg. 6: 24] will also do it for you!

d) *He also watches over the soul!*

This watchman is different because “He shall preserve your soul” [Ps. 121: 7]. In other words, He watches not only over your earthly treasures but also your salvation. He has made you righteous by sending His only begotten Son to die for our sins. This Watchman is our righteousness, *Jehovah-Tsidkenu* [Jer. 23: 6]!

3. Conclusion

The psalmist looked up to the hill in search of God, the maker of heaven and earth. Our hill is Calvary where the Christ, the maker of heaven and earth, died on the cross for our sins. By His stripes, we have been healed. He has risen and ascended to Heaven where He is sitting at the right hand of the Father as our Advocate-watchman [1 Jn 2:1]. Before His departure, He assured us through His disciples, “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you, *not as the world gives do I give to you*. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” [Jn 14: 27]. There will still be tribulation in the world but He has assured us, “be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” [Jn 16: 33]. In His role as our watchman, He has said, “I will *never* leave you nor forsake you” [Heb. 13:5], and “lo, I am with you *always*, even to the end of the age” [Matt. 28: 20].

With such adequate assurances from your Chief Shepherd, are you still afraid what the world can do to you? Be of good cheer. Make God your watchman!