

# RETURNING TO THE ORTHODOXY OF THE CHURCH

(Friday—Evening Session)

## Message Six The Church in Sardis

JL Hymns: 1122, 894

Scripture Reading: Rev. 3:1-6

- Rev 3:1 And to the messenger of the church in Sardis write: These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works, that you have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead.
- Rev 3:2 Become watchful and establish the things which remain, which were about to die; for I have found none of your works completed before My God.
- Rev 3:3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard, and keep it and repent. If therefore you will not watch, I will come as a thief, and you shall by no means know at what hour I will come upon you.
- Rev 3:4 But you have a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments, and they will walk with Me in white because they are worthy.
- Rev 3:5 He who overcomes will be clothed thus, in white garments, and I shall by no means erase his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.
- Rev 3:6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

### I. As a sign, the church in Sardis prefigures the Protestant church, from the time of the Reformation to the second coming of Christ—Rev. 3:1:

- Rev 3:1 And to the messenger of the church in Sardis write: These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works, that you have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead.
- A. When the church, in her continuous fall, came to the stage of Jezebel, God could no longer tolerate it (2:18, 20); the church in Sardis is God's reaction to Thyatira.
- Rev 2:18 And to the messenger of the church in Thyatira write: These things says the Son of God, He who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like shining bronze:
- Rev 2:20 But I have something against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, she who calls herself a prophetess and teaches and leads My slaves astray to commit fornication and to eat idol sacrifices.
- B. Sardis emerges because the Lord has seen the condition of Thyatira; in Greek *Sardis* means "the remains," "the remainder," or "the restoration."

### II. "I know your works, that you have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead"—3:1:

- Rev 3:1 And to the messenger of the church in Sardis write: These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works, that you have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead.
- A. Many have considered the reformed Protestant church to be living, but the Lord says that she is dead; she has lost the vitality of life and is living in name only.
- B. The frequent revivals in the history of the Protestant denominations are a proof that they are dead.
- C. We surely do not want to be in the condition of the church in Sardis; we want to be living and active in gospel preaching, in nourishing the new ones, in perfecting the saints, and in prophesying to build up the Body of Christ—John 15:16; Matt. 24:45; Eph. 4:12; 1 Cor. 14:1, 3-5, 12.
- John 15:16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and I set you that you should go forth and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give you.
- Matt 24:45 Who then is the faithful and prudent slave, whom the master has set over his

- household to give them food at the proper time?
- Eph 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ,
- 1 Cor 14:1 Pursue love, and desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.
- 1 Cor 14:3 But he who prophesies speaks building up and encouragement and consolation to men.
- 1 Cor 14:4 He who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but he who prophesies builds up the church.
- 1 Cor 14:5 I desire that you all speak in tongues, but especially that you would prophesy; and greater is he who prophesies than he who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, that the church may receive building up.
- 1 Cor 14:12 So also you, since you are zealous of spirits, seek that you may excel for the building up of the church.

### III. “These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars”—

#### Rev. 3:1:

- Rev 3:1 And to the messenger of the church in Sardis write: These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works, that you have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead.
- A. The seven Spirits enable the church to be intensely living, and the seven stars enable her to be intensely shining—1:4, 16a, 20.
- Rev 1:4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is coming, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,
- Rev 1:16a And He had in His right hand seven stars; ...
- Rev 1:20 The mystery of the seven stars which you saw upon My right hand and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.
- B. The dead, reformed church needs the sevenfold intensified Spirit of God and the shining leaders—3:1.
- Rev 3:1 And to the messenger of the church in Sardis write: These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works, that you have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead.
- C. The sevenfold intensified Spirit can never be replaced by the dead letters of knowledge—2 Cor. 3:6.
- 2 Cor 3:6 Who has also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant, ministers not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
- D. The seven Spirits correspond to the seven stars—Rev. 3:1:
- Rev 3:1 And to the messenger of the church in Sardis write: These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works, that you have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead.
1. A star is a messenger of a church, a leading one in a local church; such a messenger should be one with the seven Spirits of God.
  2. The stars are those who shine in the darkness and turn people from the wrong way to the right way—Dan. 12:3.
 

Dan 12:3 And those who have insight will shine like the shining of the heavenly expanse, and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars, forever and ever.
  3. Revelation 1:20 and 3:1 show that the stars are linked not only to the Spirit but also to the churches; if we would have the living star or the living stars, we need the Spirit and the church.
 

Rev 1:20 The mystery of the seven stars which you saw upon My right hand and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Rev 3:1 And to the messenger of the church in Sardis write: These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works, that you have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead.

#### **IV. “I have found none of your works completed before My God”—v. 2:**

- Rev 3:2        Become watchful and establish the things which remain, which were about to die; for I have found none of your works completed before My God.
- A.    In the eyes of God there is nothing completed in the so-called reformed churches; everything has a beginning without an end.
- B.    Nothing begun in the Reformation has ever been completed by the Protestant churches; therefore, the church in Philadelphia (vv. 7-13), signifying the church in recovery, is needed for the completion.
- Rev 3:7        And to the messenger of the church in Philadelphia write: These things says the Holy One, the true One, the One who has the key of David, the One who opens and no one will shut, and shuts and no one opens:
- Rev 3:8        I know your works; behold, I have put before you an opened door which no one can shut, because you have a little power and have kept My word and have not denied My name.
- Rev 3:9        Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, those who call themselves Jews and are not, but lie-behold, I will cause them to come and fall prostrate before your feet and to know that I have loved you.
- Rev 3:10       Because you have kept the word of My endurance, I also will keep you out of the hour of trial, which is about to come on the whole inhabited earth, to try them who dwell on the earth.
- Rev 3:11       I come quickly; hold fast what you have that no one take your crown.
- Rev 3:12       He who overcomes, him I will make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall by no means go out anymore, and I will write upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which descends out of heaven from My God, and My new name.
- Rev 3:13       He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
- C.    The Reformation did not bring the church back to the beginning; it only caused the world church to become the state churches—cf. Matt. 16:18; 18:17; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:22-23; Rev. 1:11.
- Matt 16:18     And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
- Matt 18:17     And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to hear the church also, let him be to you just like the Gentile and the tax collector.
- 1 Cor 1:2      To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, who is theirs and ours:
- Eph 1:22       And He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church,
- Eph 1:23       Which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.
- Rev 1:11       Saying, What you see write in a scroll and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamos and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.
- D.    The Lord is a Lord of completion; therefore, He requires completion—Phil. 1:6.
- Phil 1:6       Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun in you a good work will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus;

#### **V. “If therefore you will not watch, I will come as a thief, and you shall by no means know at what hour I will come upon you”—Rev. 3:3:**

- Rev 3:3        Remember therefore how you have received and heard, and keep it and repent. If therefore you will not watch, I will come as a thief, and you shall by no means know at what hour I will come upon you.
- A.    This verse indicates that Christ is the One who will come as a thief to steal away His treasures, His precious seekers.
- B.    Since many believers are spiritually dead, they will be unaware of the Lord’s coming as a thief in His secret appearing to His seekers.

- C. Only those who are matured in life and transformed in their soul will be precious enough for the Lord to steal—v. 3.  
 Rev 3:3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard, and keep it and repent. If therefore you will not watch, I will come as a thief, and you shall by no means know at what hour I will come upon you.
- D. We must be thoroughly prepared for the time of the Lord's secret coming; therefore, we must be ready and watchful—Luke 21:36; Matt. 24:42-44.  
 Luke 21:36 But be watchful at every time, beseeching that you would prevail to escape all these things which are about to happen and stand before the Son of Man.  
 Matt 24:42 Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord comes.  
 Matt 24:43 But know this, that if the householder had known in which watch the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have allowed his house to be broken into.  
 Matt 24:44 For this reason you also be ready, because at an hour when you do not expect it, the Son of Man is coming.

**VI. “You have a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments, and they will walk with Me in white because they are worthy”—Rev. 3:4:**

- A. Garments in the Bible signify what we are in our walk and living—v. 4.  
 Rev 3:4 But you have a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments, and they will walk with Me in white because they are worthy.
- B. To defile one's garments means particularly to stain them with deadness; the defiled garments indicate the presence of death or the absence of life:
1. Death is more defiling before God than sin—Lev. 11:24-25; Num. 6:6-7, 9.  
 Lev 11:24 And by these you shall become unclean; whoever touches their carcass shall be unclean until the evening,  
 Lev 11:25 And whoever carries any part of their carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening.  
 Num 6:6 All the days that he separates himself to Jehovah he shall not come near a dead person.  
 Num 6:7 He shall not make himself unclean for his father or for his mother, for his brother or for his sister, when they die, because his separation to God is upon his head.  
 Num 6:9 And if anyone dies very suddenly beside him so that he defiles the head of his separation, then he shall shave his head on the day he becomes clean; on the seventh day shall he shave it.
  2. In Revelation 3:4 defilement denotes anything of the death nature.  
 Rev 3:4 But you have a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments, and they will walk with Me in white because they are worthy.
  3. The defilement in Sardis was not the defilement of sin but the defilement of death.
- C. Those who have not defiled their garments will walk with the Lord in white—v. 4:  
 Rev 3:4 But you have a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments, and they will walk with Me in white because they are worthy.
1. White signifies not only purity but also approvedness—7:9.  
 Rev 7:9 After these things I saw, and behold, there was a great multitude which no one could number, out of every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and palm branches in their hands.
  2. White garments in Revelation 3:4 signify the walk and living that are unspotted by death and that will be approved by the Lord; this is a qualification for walking with the Lord, especially in the coming kingdom.  
 Rev 3:4 But you have a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments, and they will walk with Me in white because they are worthy.
  3. To walk in white garments is to have a living that is unspotted by death and approved in life by the Lord.

**VII. “He who overcomes will be clothed thus, in white garments”—v. 5a:**

- A. To overcome here is to overcome the deadness of the Protestant churches, that is, to overcome dead Protestantism.
- B. Christ is the white garments to clothe the overcomers:
1. *White garments* refers to livingness; to be living is to wear the white garments.
  2. If we are spiritually dead, we are dirty; such a dead person is the dirtiest one; also if we are dead, we are naked—16:15.  
Rev 16:15 (Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments that he may not walk naked and they see his shame.)
  3. We need the living garment to cover us; this living garment is Christ Himself wrought into us by the life-giving Spirit; the only way to have this garment is to turn to the spirit and live in the mingled spirit—Gal. 4:19; Eph. 3:16; 1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:4.  
Gal 4:19 My children, with whom I travail again in birth until Christ is formed in you,  
Eph 3:16 That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man,  
1 Cor 6:17 But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.  
Rom 8:4 That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit.
  4. Being clothed in white garments, as promised in Revelation 3:5, will be a prize to the overcomers in the millennial kingdom; what they have been walking in during this age will be a prize to them in the coming age.  
Rev 3:5 He who overcomes will be clothed thus, in white garments, and I shall by no means erase his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.
- C. Every Christian needs two garments—Luke 15:22; Matt. 22:12:
- Luke 15:22 But the father said to his slaves, Bring out quickly the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.
- Matt 22:12 And he said to him, Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment? And he was speechless.
1. The first garment is the garment of salvation, signifying Christ as our righteousness objectively:
    - a. In Luke 15:22, when the prodigal son returned home, the first thing that the father did was to have the best robe placed upon him.  
Luke 15:22 But the father said to his slaves, Bring out quickly the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.
    - b. Wearing the best robe, he was justified and approved; this means that he was justified in Christ and that Christ became his justifying covering.
    - c. He was covered with Christ as his righteousness; thus, the garment of justification is for salvation.
  2. In addition to the garment of justification, we need another garment to make us approved and well pleasing to the Lord—Matt. 22:12; Rev. 3:5a:  
Matt 22:12 And he said to him, Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment? And he was speechless.  
Rev 3:5a He who overcomes will be clothed thus, in white garments, ...
    - a. This is the garment of approvedness for our acceptance, signifying the Christ whom we live out as our subjective righteousness—Phil. 1:21; 3:9:  
Phil 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.  
Phil 3:9 And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is out of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is out of God and based on faith,
      - 1) The “fine linen, bright and clean” in Revelation 19:8 denotes this second garment.  
Rev 19:8 And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints.

- 2) According to typology, the queen in Psalm 45 has two garments: one for salvation and the other for her to be with the King in His reign (vv. 8, 13-14).

Psa 45 be omitted.

Psa 45:8 All Your garments smell of myrrh and aloes, of cassia; / From palaces of ivory, harpstrings have made You glad.

Psa 45:13 The king's daughter is all glorious within the royal abode; / Her garment is a woven work inwrought with gold.

Psa 45:14 She will be led to the King in embroidered clothing; / The virgins behind her, her companions, / Will be brought to You.

- b. We have been saved and justified and have the first garment—Christ as our objective righteousness—for our salvation; now we need to go on to experience Christ as our subjective righteousness so that we may have the second garment—Phil. 3:9.

Phil 3:9 And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is out of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is out of God and based on faith,

- c. Christ as our objective righteousness has been put upon us, whereas Christ as our subjective righteousness comes out of us.

- d. The white garments in Revelation 3:5 refer to the second garment, which is needed for us to receive the reward and enter into the kingdom to walk with the Lord, that is, to reign with Him—2 Tim. 2:11-12.

Rev 3:5 He who overcomes will be clothed thus, in white garments, and I shall by no means erase his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

2 Tim 2:11 Faithful is the word: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him;

2 Tim 2:12 If we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us;

- D. We all should overcome the dead situation in religion, conquer all kinds of death, and wear the white garments—Rev. 3:4-5a.

Rev 3:4 But you have a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments, and they will walk with Me in white because they are worthy.

Rev 3:5 He who overcomes will be clothed thus, in white garments, ...

## Excerpts from the Ministry:

### THE CHURCH'S CONDITION

#### Living in Name, but Dead in Actuality

To the messenger of the church in Sardis the Lord says, “I know your works, that you have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead. Become watchful and establish the things which remain, which were about to die; for I have found none of your works completed before My God” (Rev. 3:1-2). These two verses present a full picture of the so-called Protestant Church. The reformed Protestant Church has been considered to be living, but the Lord says that she is dead. Hence, in her dead condition, she needs the living Spirits and the shining stars.

#### The Remaining Things Being about to Die

In verse 2 the Lord says to “establish the things which remain, which were about to die.” “The things which remain” are the things lost and restored by the Reformation, such as justification by faith and the open Bible. Though these things were restored, they “were about to die.” Hence, the Protestant Church needs revivals to keep things alive. This is the actual situation of the Protestant churches.

#### Having No Work Completed

The Lord also said, “I have found none of your works completed before My God.” Nothing begun in the Reformation has ever been completed. Therefore, the church in Philadelphia is needed for the

completion. In the eyes of God, there are no complete works in the so-called reformed churches. Do not think that justification by faith is completed among them. If you have the inner sight, you will see that the justification by faith recovered by Martin Luther was quite shallow, for Luther did not touch justification very much in the way of life, but mainly in the way of doctrine, in a superficial way. We thank the Lord for this great servant of God, but he was not perfect. None of the work under his hand was completed. The things recovered in the days of Luther have been dying and are still about to die. This is why so many Protestant churches have frequent revivals.

The crucial point about the fifth church is that it is dead and dying. While it has a name that it is living, actually it is dead. Many of us can testify that when we were saved, we were quite living. But after getting into a denominational church, we were put into the refrigerator and, after a few months, we cooled down and died. The reformed churches are deadening. I was raised in a so-called Protestant church, and I know that there is absolutely no life there. In nearly every way, it is filled with death.

## **THE OVERCOMERS—A FEW NAMES IN SARDIS**

### **Not Having Defiled Their Garments with Death**

In verse 4 the Lord says, “But you have a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments.” Garments in the Bible signify what we are in our walk and living. To defile the garments means particularly to stain them with deadness. Death is more defiling before God than sin (Lev. 11:24-25; Num. 6:6, 7, 9). In this verse, the defilement denotes anything of the death nature. The defilement in Sardis was not the defilement of sin; it was the defilement of death. Death is dirtier than sin. According to the Old Testament, if anyone sinned, he could be forgiven simply by offering the sin offering (Lev. 4:27-31). However, anyone who touched the dead body of a man had to wait seven days before he could be cleansed (Num. 19:11, 16). This indicates that the defilement of death is more serious than that of sin. Christians today have no consciousness of death. If you go to Las Vegas to gamble in a casino, you will sense that you have sinned. But if you came to a meeting in a dead way, you may not sense the seriousness of it. But in the eyes of God, this death situation is more serious than gambling in a Las Vegas casino. Although Christians condemn sin, they do not condemn deadness. People sit in the meetings like corpses and they see nothing wrong with it. I do not like to be near anything dead. One day, my mother died. Although we all loved her, none of us dared to stay near her dead body overnight. If your dear wife would dirty herself while doing something for you, you would love her more than ever before. But if she were to die, you would not want to be near her dead body. The Lord hates death. However, most Christians in the reformed churches do not have this concept of death. They may say, “What is wrong with the denominational churches?” They are not only wrong—they are filled with death. Though there may be nothing wrong with the corpses in a mortuary, they are full of death. Death is the greatest problem. How ugly it is! It is a stench to God, and He cannot tolerate it.

In the local churches, we all must hate death. I would rather see the people in the churches wrong than to see them dead. Many times I have asked the brothers and sisters why they do not function in the meetings. Often their reply was, “I’m afraid of making a mistake.” To this, I responded, “The more mistakes you make, the better. Living children make many mistakes. But the dead children in the cemeteries make no mistakes at all.” If you simply sit in the meeting without doing anything, you will never be wrong. Although you may be right, you will be dead right. I would rather be livingly wrong than dead right. I may make mistakes, but everyone will know how living I am. Which do you prefer—to be dead right or livingly wrong?

### **Walking with the Lord in White**

Speaking of these who have not defiled their garments, the Lord says that “they will walk with Me in white because they are worthy” (Rev. 3:4). White not only signifies purity, but also approvedness. White garments here signify the walk and living which are unspotted by death and which will be approved by the Lord. It is a qualification for walking with the Lord, especially in the coming

kingdom.

### **THE PROMISE TO THE OVERCOMER**

If you read the context of Revelation 2 and 3, you will see that every time the Lord gives a promise in these seven epistles, strictly speaking it refers to the coming kingdom. It never refers to eternity, to our eternal destiny. Rather, it refers to our future in the coming kingdom. This is the basic and governing principle in understanding all the promises in these seven epistles. In verse 4 the Lord promises that the living ones, those who have not defiled their garments, will walk with Him in white. When will this be? In the wedding day of Christ which will last for a thousand years. To walk with the Lord in white means to walk with Him during these thousand years. In principle, this must also be applied to our walk with the Lord today.

In verse 5 the Lord says, “He who overcomes will be clothed thus, in white garments, and I shall by no means erase his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” To overcome here means to overcome the deadness of the Protestant churches, that is, to overcome dead Protestantism. The whole of verse 5 is the Lord’s promise to the overcomers. It will be fulfilled in the millennial kingdom after He comes back.

#### **To Be Clothed in White Garments, Walking with the Lord**

Firstly, the Lord promises the overcomer that he will be “clothed...in white garments.” To be “clothed...in white garments” in this promise will be a prize to the overcomers in the millennial kingdom. In what they have been walking in this age, will be a prize to them in the coming age. Every Christian needs two garments. The first is the garment of salvation signifying Christ as our righteousness objectively. In Luke 15, when the prodigal son returned home, the father had the best robe prepared for him. The first thing the father did was to have the best robe placed upon him. Wearing that robe, the prodigal son was justified in the presence of the father. He had been a pitiful beggar, no longer worthy to be with the father. But once he had the robe upon him, he was justified and approved. This means that he was justified in Christ and that Christ became his justifying covering. He was covered by Christ as his righteousness. Thus, the garment of justification is for salvation. However, besides this, we need another garment to make us approved and well-pleasing to the Lord. The “fine linen, bright and clean” in Revelation 19:8 denotes this second garment. According to typology, the queen in Psalm 45 has two garments, one for salvation and the other for her to be with the King in His reign. After we have been saved, we need to mature and overcome all frustrations and distractions. We must run the race and reach the goal. As we are running the race, there are many things which would frustrate us from reaching the goal. We must overcome all these frustrations. Yes, we have been saved and justified and have the first robe for our salvation. But we must go on to maturity and reach our destination. If we do so, then we shall receive a reward. This is not a matter of Christ as our objective righteousness, but of experiencing Christ as our subjective righteousness. Christ as our objective righteousness has been put upon us, whereas Christ as our subjective righteousness comes out of us. We must live out Christ as our second garment. This garment is for the reward. The white garments mentioned in Revelation 3:5 refer to this second garment. When we have this second garment, we are well-pleasing to the Lord and shall receive the reward. (*Life-study of Revelation*, pp. 170-171, 173-176)

#### **CHRIST AS THE ONE WHO WILL COME AS A THIEF**

Revelation 3:3 says, “If therefore you will not watch, I will come as a thief, and you shall by no means know at what hour I will come upon you.” This verse indicates that Christ is the One who will come as a thief to steal away His treasures, His precious seekers. A thief comes to steal precious things at an unknown time. Since many believers are spiritually dead, they will be unaware of the Lord’s coming as a thief in His secret appearing to His seekers. Hence, there is the need of watchfulness.

The revelation in the New Testament regarding the Lord’s second coming is not according to our natural understanding. According to our natural thought, the Lord will suddenly descend from the

throne in the heavens to the earth. According to the pure Word of God, however, the Lord's coming back is a process. His coming back will begin from the throne and will pass through a process until He descends to fight the battle at Armageddon. The Lord will descend from the throne to the air where He will accomplish many things: the rapture of the majority of the saints, the judgment at the judgment seat, and the wedding of the Lamb. After all this has been accomplished in the air, the Lord will descend to the earth. The rapture of the early overcomers, including the man-child (ch. 12) and the firstfruits (ch. 14), will occur at the start of the process of the Lord's coming back. In other words, when they are raptured, the process of the Lord's coming back begins.

Christ will come back secretly as a thief (3:3b; 16:15). No thief tells you in advance the time of his arrival. In His secret coming as a thief, Christ will come to steal the precious things. No thief steals things that are without value. Thieves come to steal only what is valuable. We need to be a treasure in the eyes of the Lord. We need to be precious by being mature so that He will come and take us secretly. Only those who are matured in life and transformed in their soul will be precious enough for the Lord to steal. As long as we are untransformed, we can be assured that the Thief will never come to visit us. The time of His secret coming is unknown. We all must ask ourselves if we are precious and if we are worthy of being stolen by Christ in His secret coming.

Suddenly, some of the believers who are the early overcomers will be taken away by the Lord coming as a thief (Matt. 24:43). No one knows the time of the beginning of the process of the Lord's coming back and of the rapture of the early overcomers. When it comes, there will be no time for us to prepare ourselves. We must be thoroughly prepared before that time. Therefore, we must be ready and watchful.

In Matthew 24:40 and 41, the Lord spoke of His secret coming, saying, "At that time two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left." The Lord Jesus was very wise, using two brothers in the field and two sisters grinding at the mill as illustrations. Apparently the two brothers are the same and the two sisters are the same. But suddenly one of the brothers and one of the sisters are taken. After giving this illustration, the Lord said, "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord comes. But know this, that if the householder had known in which watch the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you also be ready, because at an hour when you do not expect it, the Son of Man is coming" (vv. 42-44). As we are working, having no consciousness that Christ is coming, some of us will be raptured. Since He is coming as a thief, we must be watchful. (*The Conclusion of the New Testament*, pp. 4194-4195)