

SPEECH TO
HILL COUNTRY CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
FIFTH SUNDAY EVENING SERVICE,
BERTRAM, TEXAS, DEC. 31, 1962.

Since we stand tonight at the expiration of the old year and upon the threshold of a new year, it is not amiss that we consider lessons from the past and assurances we have for the future.

While we may regret our failures of the past year, and rejoice in our successes, actually we can no more assay the merit of the past than we can assess the events of the future. But, we do have this assurance as Christians: we may not know what the future holds, but we know whose hands hold the future.

This scripture that I have read to you relates that those in Edom cried out to the prophets of Israel to know what the future held for them. "Watchman, what of the night." The answer "The morning comes, and the night," is held by some students of exegesis and exhortation to be obscure and deliberately vague. They believe it refers to some incident in the life of the people of Edom and those of Israel, concerning which we have no other information, and we cannot therefore completely understand its meaning.

There is evidence in this scripture, however: That in this life when we are in darkness we can have hope for the light. However, even when we receive light, there will also be darkness, in our finite imperfections we cannot achieve, by ourselves, the victory over the darkness. We clearly see the thought that, even with hope there is some disappointment and doubt. Since, however, the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, frequently used the watchman symbolism for those whom God had commissioned to warn of the evil and the ungodly, and to point the way to the right, it is not difficult for us to think of the Christian people, the Church of God; those who are called by His name, as the watchmen, to whom bewildered and unhappy people turn and cry, "Watchman, what of the night?" What answer do you have for them?

No matter how much the light of the love of God shines abroad in the world, there is still darkness, for evil remains.

Hon. E. C. Evans, Grand Master of the Masonic Grand Lodge of Prince Edward Island, one of the provinces of our neighboring nation to the North, a few years ago, in his annual message to the Grand Lodge, said:

"Every day is not only a day of peril, but it is also a day of opportunity and hope."

This is the same thought expressed differently. It is intended to emphasize opportunity and hope, and so would I tonight.

None need to be reminded of the perils that surround us. Hourly broadcasting of the news does that. Every moment of unrest; every act of aggression; every bone chilling threat of world wide destruction comes to our ears within moments of its happening.

Nor are the perils that surround us limited to worldwide matters. We are reminded daily, if not hourly, that the seriousness of what we term juvenile delinquency in this country threatens the very foundations of some of our communities.

We need only listen of the sorrowing lament of those who have lost loved ones, and the cries of the maimed and the disfigured, to recall the peril to us from our attitude towards the use of our highways.

Then there are those in high places, those in whom great confidence have been reposed, even those who have stood in pulpits, who have betrayed the trust reposed in them, violated every confidence, and betrayed those who loved them.

Cynicism does not seem so distasteful to us now as it once did, because all of us must have a touch of it in view of the events of the last few years.

Churches find difficulty in securing attendance sufficient to keep the work going.

Those concerned for community welfare find great apathy towards all community building efforts.

All of these things are very real perils, for permitted to continue they will ultimately destroy our nation as the same things have done other nations in the past.

Whether or not we can define these perils, we cannot doubt that they surround us. Nor do we doubt the bewilderment that ensues; the doubt that prevails; the need for love, faith and hope in the world today.

Let us remind ourselves, however, that the greater the peril, the greater the opportunity for service, the greater our need for our hope in God. We know that into our hands, as though poured into an imperfect vase, has been committed the hope and the power to resist the evils of this day and every day. The question we must ask ourselves is, will we make a proper use of that which is committed to us.

Tradition gives us the picture of the Prophet when he was distraught because of the sins of his people, and because they would not return to God, that he walked the streets of Jerusalem late into the night, seeking assurance from the one whom he knew to be the only source of assurance. As his doubts crowded upon him; as his love of his nation and his people who were in such great jeopardy oppressed him, he looked high upon the wall of Jerusalem and saw there a watchman walking his beat. He cried unto him, "Watchman, what of the night." Quickly there came back the triumphant words, "the morning comes."

If you feel despondency because of the apathy of those about you concerning the community needs. If you feel the danger surrounding you from disregard of law, which in turn will destroy organized society. If you can feel the earthquake and typhoon of sound from the nuclear fission testing, which seems to ominously foredoom the world to destruction, and the end of time. If these things bear upon your soul as his grief did upon Jeremiah, then lift up your head to the watchman on Christendom's battle men's and cry out, "Watchman, what of the night." Your very being will tingle with strength and encouragement at the reply, "The morning comes."

That which is wrong; which is evil, which is bad, always seems to gain the great publicity, while that which is good, and right is doomed to obscurity.

Let a Boy Scout do his good deed for today by running some important but difficult errand for an elderly person, and you probably will not hear of it unless you live next door, and perhaps not then. But let a boy of equal age shoot out a windshield with a BB gun in the next state, and headlines flare.

You will recall when the radio thundered almost continuously, and television frequently, and the papers with every issue with the destruction and death in Hungary to appease the Red Gods of vengeance. While that was going on, there was a little girl, from an obscure village, poor family, and of not great importance as the world counts it, who was dying for the need of heart surgery. An American who was in her land was told of this, and he began to call by intercontinental telephone until he had arranged for the little girl to be flown from her home, half way around the world, to New York, and there for hospital facilities, and a great surgeon, for the surgery, and care, and for her return when well. This was printed only in one magazine, read by a limited number of people interested in crippled children.

This happens so constantly, that we are apt to make the mistake of being so conscious of the presence of evil, that we forget the presence and the power of good.

We forget that the great Battle of Armageddon is being fought by the forces of darkness and light, whatever they may be called, good and evil, godly and ungodly, or whatever. We must not forget that we are assured that the forces of the right, of the good, of the Godly, shall ultimately triumph, and that the ones who give of themselves in this battle upon the side of the forces of good and right shall be preserved, by the only savior there can possibly be.

You know Elijah made that mistake one time. Ahab and Jezebel (who could lay Khrushchiev and Castro in the shade for pure evil) had oppressed Elijah so much, and there seemed so few who would stand up for God, that the great prophet of the wastelands became convinced that he was the only one on God's side left. He ran away and hid in the desert, underneath a juniper tree. When God asked him what he was doing of down there when the battle was raging elsewhere, he answered that he was the only one who was faithful to God left and now they were trying to kill him. God took him up in the mountains, and while he was in a cave he experienced the threatening, shattering, grinding force of an earthquake, and the ear-splitting, cruel crescendo of sound that goes with a tornado. When they had let up, there was a great stillness, and in that stillness he heard a voice saying, "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit sayeth the Lord God." Then God revealed to Elijah that he was not the only faithful one, that there was seven thousand others ready to stand with him and help.

Do not let evil's press agency convince you that evil has over come the good.

I do not wish to minimize the perils around us. They do exist. We must look them full in the face and meet them with courage and determination. But this I would emphasize, for every peril there is an opportunity -- an opportunity to make Christianity as living, vital force, and therefore to bring to the hour not despair but hope. The Church, as the body of our Lord's people, is the watchman upon the battlements of today. As members of it, we might ask ourselves this question, have we the faith, the love and the hope in our own hearts to cry out a message of hope to the world. Can we make the good news of God relevant to today's needs?

Our Brotherhood calls the sixties the "Decade of Decision." The decision is for us to make, as well as others.

In America today we have demonstrated that we can compute with such accuracy, that we can devise with such ingenuity, and manufacture with such precision and power a vehicle with which we can reach the planet Venus. This is a truly tremendous and remarkable achievement. But for all of this, we have not learned to live in harmony with our neighbor in the next block.

There may be a battle of the worlds, but if so, it will be because we did not learn how to live with one another brethren, not because we have spacecraft capable of it.

We may not have the opportunities for service and for testimony such as the healer of the Lambarene, or the Burma surgeon, but probably within a block of us there are those who need help, encouragement, comforting,

consoling, material assistance. We need to see our neighbor at hand and across the world as one to love, and one to serve.

There are those close to us in hospitals who yearn not to be forgotten.

There are hungry children many places, and they won't forget a Christian helping hand.

There are children near by, and children far away, who need homes - a place of shelter, and a place where love is to be found.

There are many young people today who feel utterly frustrated because they have come to the conclusion that there is nothing they can do to help change things for the better.

They feel that evil has already triumphed. There are those who feel it unnecessary to die in defense of freedom, because they feel that actually there is nothing good or right in the world to die for. They have never seen Christ upon a cross. They do not know what giving of one's self completely means or can mean. They are the ones who say it is better to be Red than dead. They have to hope - they have no belief - in the ultimate victory of the right - in fact they have no conception of the right.

Has the Church a relevant message for them?

Can we truthfully say to them from our hearts, "The morning comes."

Are we serving within the body of Christ, his church, with sufficient fidelity to Him, that when the cry comes up to us out of the wilderness of a hopeless mind, and the helplessness of a defeated spirit, "Watchman, what of the night?" that our answer resounds "the morning comes."

When we ourselves feel our moments of doubt, and hopelessness, do we have the faith to lift up our heads and cry to the watchman on the towers, "what of the night?"

Yes, every day is not only a day of peril, it is a day of opportunity and hope!

"Watchman, what of the night?"

Let your very being thrill with me to the answer:

"The morning comes."