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"IF YE THEN BE RISEN WITH CHRIST, SEEK THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST SITTETH ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD." COL. 3. 1.

"R I S I N G     E A R L Y".

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by

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"R I S I N G     E A R L Y".

It is delightful to realize that "When Christ Who is our Life shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory". This is a PRECIOUS prospect; but to appear with Him in glory has not yet taken place. "We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened" - not with the groaning of complaint, not with the groaning which dishonours the Lord, but the groaning that reminds us He IS coming. Many difficulties can be met by breaking the Lord's will - is it worth the cost? - the cost of losing at the Judgment Seat of Christ?

Among other things, I have been deeply impressed, and I think you have been impressed, with the importance of rising early, as it is set forth in Scripture, and this subject came before me as containing meditations for our humble and prayerful consideration to-night. We shall not be able to finish it - so full is every Scriptural theme; but I would not omit to remind you, beloved friends, at the outset, that no PHYSICAL action can accomplish the Lord's will. A physical action which suggests earnestness, may be grievous to the Lord. "They rose early and corrupted all their doings"; but the Lord OFTEN works through the physical. I know of nothing in Scripture that suggests holiness to the exclusion of the physical, "Present your BODIES a living sacrifice" (Rom. 12.1). Holiness is largely a matter of the body, "Glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6.20). Your BODIES are members of Christ. This is God's teaching as to holiness. There is no room for a dreamy and nominal holiness which leaves out the body, or the details of a bodily life of pleasing God.

We have noticed - many, perhaps all of us - how beautifully, when the Lord told Abraham to

offer up his son, he rose early in the morning; how Joshua rose early; how Hezekiah rose early; how the Lord distinctly commanded Moses to rise early, when Israel were to be brought out; how Samuel rose early and brought God's plan before Saul; and how the manna was given early.

Further, how on the resurrection morning Christ began the new aspect of the new dispensation by His early journeyings; and those who were encouraged in seeing their Lord were early morning risers; and how the present dispensation began with an early morning prayer meeting, for much had been done and yet it was only 9 o'clock in the day. On that Lord's Day morning, instead of saints finding 9 o'clock in the morning early, much had been gone through before 9 o'clock. Peter said, "It is but the third hour of the day", and much was already accomplished in the fellowship of saints. Thus the Lord has marked out the TWO beginnings with regard to the present dispensation, the two occurrences of the Lord's Day, and shown a definite blessing on the saints in the early morning. It is true that there is the stress on the Lord's Day EVENING as well, with regard to the Breaking of the Bread, but the blessing to saints in personal fellowship with the Lord and in the receiving of much power, and in united fellowship too, is partly associated with sunrise time, and partly with a period before nine o'clock in the morning. That is how the Lord BEGAN the dispensation, and forgetfulness of this has been one of the greatest hindrances in the present time. I do not mean forgetfulness of the bare fact, but forgetfulness of the principle underlying it.

But I cannot say that this was the SPECIAL thought on my mind; rather I was concerned with the many allusions in JEREMIAH to the Lord rising early. It seems that 2 Chronicles, which is closely associated with Jeremiah (cf. the

endings) has the same stress. There we find in ch. 36.15, "And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwellingplace". And when we approach the book of Jeremiah, we find this stress becomes almost wearying - UNLESS our hearts enter into it. In Jer. 7.13, "And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the Lord, and I spake unto you RISING UP EARLY and speaking". Again, the 25th verse, "Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all My servants the prophets, DAILY RISING UP EARLY and sending them". Ch. 11.7, "For I earnestly protested unto your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, even unto this day, RISING UP EARLY and protesting saying, Obey My voice".

Ch. 25.3,4. "From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, even unto this day, that is the three and twentieth year, the word of the Lord hath come unto me, and I have spoken unto you, RISING EARLY and speaking". Here is a most remarkable testimony of a man who did not miss one day of rising early from the thirteenth year of Josiah right up to the twenty-third year from that date, that is to say, not only ten years as we might at first think, but twenty three years. He had never spoilt one day by rising carelessly and late. His testimony for the Lord had been connected with this consistent zeal - every day for twenty three continuous years. "And the Lord hath sent unto you ALL His servants the prophets rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear". Thus we see there was not a single prophet who formed the habit of lying in bed. God would not use a man who was thus lying in bed late. At least the passage seems to imply this.

In every case the prophet rose early; there is not a singly exception. Jeremiah's record is clear.

Ch. 26.5. "Hearken to the words of My servants the prophets, whom I sent unto you, both RISING UP EARLY, and sending them, but ye have not hearkened". God sometimes says that the prophets rose up early, sometimes that He rose up early. Why is this? - He IDENTIFIED Himself with the prophets. The Lord has shown He would not identify Himself with one who did not rise early. Unless there was sufficient fervour to rise early, the Lord would not use the man in the same way - that is the testimony of this chapter. Ch. 29.19. "Because they have not hearkened to My words, saith the Lord, which I sent unto them by My servants the prophets, RISING UP EARLY and sending them; but ye would not hear, saith the Lord". Ch. 32.33. "And they have turned unto Me the back and not the face; though I taught them, RISING UP EARLY and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction".

Ch. 35.14,15. "I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking. I have sent also unto you all My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them". Observe here the twofold statement - "I have risen up early and spoken", "I have sent to you all My servants", and thus "they have risen up early". "I have risen up early" to speak to them, and thus, inferentially, they have risen up early; they have been wakened early. "He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the taught ones". The Lord graciously emphasized that there was the morning by morning blessedness: CONTINUANCE again shown. Ch. 44. 4. "Howbeit I sent unto you all My servants the prophets RISING EARLY and sending them, saying, Ch, do not this abominable thing that I hate".

Here we have that which is, I believe, a twelvefold witness as to the Lord rising up early -

there may be other passages. Now it is almost wearying, unless our hearts enter into the thought: but it is God's own witness. And, though there is no merit in rising early, though the time may still be misused AFTER this, it is almost impossible to progress in the Christian life, UNLESS one rises early, at least to the same extent as if one would simply emphasize the Lord's arrangements "early". And, as we have seen, the Lord in the old dispensation would not use, in certain important service, any one who omitted this privilege. Since the day He brought them out from Egypt, right up to the day of the captivity, the Lord emphasized the same principle without one exception. Jeremiah tells us it was not only for his own advantage or for himself as a personal matter. We might say, "Oh, Jeremiah was personally called to that". But since the day the Lord brought them out of Egypt, He did not allow one exception. There was a Divine principle which stood its ground. Child of God after child of God has backslidden on this very point.

The loss of power is often linked with a failure to realize that God has emphasized the principle of rising early. There are several reasons which are on the very surface. One is, if there is NOT the rising early, the result is the indulgence of the flesh, and that which indulges the flesh necessarily brings failure of usefulness, and loss of personal victory. There is another very evident reason - if there is not the rising early, the tendency is to rush through many things, and a rush through prayer and a rush through meditation must bring spiritual loss. Beloved friends, it is not merely a duty which God presents, without any reason for it. If it were so, we would welcome the thought on His precious authority: but here we can also see how easily the appointment is associated with OPPORTUNITY for

blessing, and how the absence of harmony with this appointment involves running into temptation. If we avoid the privilege, and pray, "Lead us not into temptation", we are turning our face toward the danger all the time. Again, if there is not the rising early there is the probability, at least the great probability, of having an influence upon others to do the same. They may be resident with us, or they may be those who know of our action. We all copy one another, and readily find excuses in one another. Furthermore, if the Lord is not "first", as a general principle every day, there must be a failure. Hence, it is REASONABLE to rise early for Him. Again, the Lord has shown that earnestness is a very important matter, and if a man does not rise early he does not show much concern for souls, or much concern for the things of the Lord. Hence the Lord refused to employ a man who would not rise early. There would be no evidence of a real testimony for Himself. A man might be one who wished to please God, but he was not used as a prophet, he was not permitted to take the testimony of God in this service, day by day to the people - how would there be an evidence of concern if there was not a victory over bed? Unless there were an encouragement before God in THIS matter, though a man might live a life which had certain other encouraging characteristics, his condition as a servant would have become a disgrace to the Name of the Lord, and therefore the Lord did not put him in some responsible position. The Lord has loving arrangements for those who are not placed in one sphere or another, He lovingly bears with all His people, but privileges are often associated with a condition, and a condition of regularity. It is not that Scripture emphasizes rising up early one day a week, or spasmodically, but DAILY - herein is the stress. I am not sure that this is, in another

sense, more difficult. I am inclined to think it is far easier to give up much than to give up a little. A half-way giving up means preserving enough of the temptation to cause a continual battle, whereas a whole-hearted giving up often breaks the fear of temptation, and BECOMES much easier. This is so in all the Christian life. A half-way victory is usually much more painful than a definite break with anything that is a chain. A temporary gradual attempt to free ourselves is often a cruel burden to ourselves. Firmness for the Lord brings not only victory in the Spirit, but also more enjoyment and more ease; yet oftentimes we all shrink from this.

Beloved friends, in so speaking of the practical aspects of the Christian life, do not please think for one moment that the one speaking has taken the standpoint of victory, to give instruction to those who have not the standpoint of victory - nothing of the kind! I feel that there are many things in my own life which need much victory, and I rejoice that there are many things in the dear children of God present, that manifest much victory. It is not a question of a word from the standpoint of victory to others who are in the condition of failure, but a desire that we may exhort ONE ANOTHER, and edify ONE ANOTHER, as we look for that Blessed Hope, and together mutually recognize God's standpoint. I do feel this, and I think many of God's dear people agree with me, that the standpoint here set forth is remarkably emphasized, and that it means much more than we have at present recognized, and that it shows where some of our failures have come in - either by excusing sin on this point, or by variability. The Holy Spirit's stress is not only on the word "early", but on "daily", and the battle must be fought, and must be won, for a DAILY encouragement from the Lord.

We have some idea of what "early" means in connection with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The references to the word "sunrise" give a hint, and we can find out some of the few sunrise arrangements in general at that time of the year. We know what the sunrise time was then; we see the Lord's view of "early". It is important to recognize that the victory, though a measure of strain, may be used to equip for more service to the Lord, and is it not worth while to be used by Him? Is it not worth while losing SOMETHING, that we may be employed by Him? It is true that the bare outward victory will not make us useful, to be AWAKE is not enough - to be WAKENED means much more, "HE wakeneth morning by morning". The Lord has never wakened a man late - so far as we know from what Isa. 50 suggests. The Lord does not imply that He approves of wakening one irregularly. His promise and His principle involve wakening regularly, morning by morning, that His people may have a regular fellowship with Himself. Here we falter. We may have a regular habit of rising, and YET lose fellowship with Himself. Ah, beloved friends, do we not need to be bowed before God in this? Only One could perfectly say, "He wakeneth morning by morning", but those who STAND in the Lord's counsel are those whom the Lord will use in some measure - in increasing measure. Hence the act of rising early is only one half of the subject, if I might so put it. The other half is, to be wakened by the Lord and caused to hear His voice. If we are not wakened, we are not ready for the Lord's voice, but if we are wakened and hear not the Lord's voice, the MECHANICAL without the SPIRITUAL is a failure. But if the two are together, and there is the power of the Holy Spirit, in ANY measure - thanks be unto God that, even though we be as rejected as Jeremiah, and though we be not prophets in the sense of Jeremiah, yet we can be

used by the Lord.

Oh that there may be in our believing heart an enthusiasm for Him, a zeal for Him, that in the power of the Holy Spirit, there may be these lives of victory henceforth. I commend this to you, beloved friends, to lay before the Lord, and ask Him what it means for yourself, and probably if He grant grace, the subject will come again before us at the holiday meetings<sup>x</sup>. Meanwhile, let faith trust Him, let love delight in His will, and let victory be enjoyed to His praise alone.

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<sup>x</sup>This expectation was graciously granted to His glory.