

# MORNING WATCH

A HERALD OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE, AS BRIDEGROOM, REAPER AND KING!

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## NEW YEAR RESOLUTION

At the beginning of every New Year it is customary to look forward and to make good resolutions. This is not a bad plan, even though some of the resolutions are not kept. It is true one may make good resolutions every day, and may break them as often. Human nature is weak, and temptations are subtle. But many do not recognize that a weak will is equally with other weaknesses an inheritance from defective ancestors, and therefore as much as other weaknesses a reason for pleading and accepting divine mercy and forgiveness.

A resolution is a concrete expression of a desire and determination to accomplish a certain object. It is not therefore a vow, nor is it a pledge. A vow was more in the nature of an oath to God, as may be seen by the use of both words in Num. 30:2, 13. The vowing of the vow seemed to refer to the definite promise made in the heart, whereas the swearing of the oath seemed to be a more public expression calling upon God to witness thereto.

Our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount referred to the vows which God commanded in the Mosaic Law— "Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time. Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths." This is a manifest reference to Lev. 27:1-34; Num. 30:1-16, and similar passages in the Law where God gave directions concerning the carrying out of vows. These vows consisted in free-will offerings. (Dent. 23:23; Mal. 1:14.) God was a party to the vow, and any failure in the performance was visited with His wrath, the only exceptions being in the case or women prevented in a prescribed manner beyond their control from fulfilling their vows. Jehovah said of him who made a vow, "He shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth." "Thou shalt not slack to pay it, for the Lord thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee." (Num. 30:2; Dent. 23:21.) Nothing already devoted to the Lord, such as the first fruits, could be used as a vow or free-will offering. Of the offerings brought, such as unclean beasts, or the sanctifying of a house or land, which could not be offered on the altar, it was ordained that the priests should value them, and the vower must bring the money value, plus one-fifth, to the priest for the Lord's service.—Lev. 27.

Our Lord may also have referred to the oaths or solemn promises entered into by the whole people of Israel at Sinai, also by individuals and the nation subsequently, as under Asa. (2 Chron. 15:15.) They were not to swear falsely, but to perform that which they agreed to do. Especially did he condemn the later practice of scribes, Pharisees and rulers of the synagogues who not only encouraged the people to make elaborate oaths on a great variety of subjects, swearing by heaven, by God's throne, and by the temple, but also sought to make a distinction in the value of an oath, according as it was sworn by the temple or by the gold of the temple, by the altar or by the sacrifice on the altar.—Matt. 23:16-22.

But the Lord, who in the Sermon on the Mount went on to show that swearing and oaths and vows to make certain offerings were not really necessary. It is sufficient to say Yes or No; and to perform without boasting or display the acts of religious service.

### Jephthah's Daughter

The strictness with which vows were enforced under the Law is shown in the case of Jephthah and his daughter. (Judges 11:30-40.) In his agreement with the Gileadites, Jephthah "uttered all his words *before the Lord* in Mizpeh." and his vow to devote to the Lord what first came forth from the doors of his house to

meet him on his return from battle, was a definite agreement with God. It was made according to the directions in the Law which God agreed to participate in. His daughter, as a child of faith, as well as an obedient daughter, recognized the sacred-



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ness of the vow, and had no hesitation in assisting her father in its fulfillment. Thus all the remaining years of her life were spent as one set apart to God. The popular notion that she was

offered as a sacrifice on the altar is incorrect; God did not authorize human sacrifices.

## The Nazarite and the Levite

The vow of the Nazarite is described in Num. 6:1-21. All the details were prescribed by the Lord, who accepted the Nazarite as an offering to Himself. Samson was a Nazarite, as was also Samuel, the latter having been presented to the Lord by his mother. (1 Sam. 1:11, 26-28.) Any Levite might come to the tabernacle or temple, to devote himself wholly to God's service, and was to be accepted as a servant by the priests in charge, sharing also in the portions allotted to the Levites in attendance.—Dent. 18:6-8.

## Obedience versus Vows

Hut the Law did not encourage the Jew to make vows and take oaths of their own devising. They were told not to enter into covenants with the native Canaanites (Exod. 34:12, 15), and their relations to one another were so carefully regulated by the Mosaic Code that there was little or no room for extra-legal agreements. They were warned that if they were witnesses of an oath they must declare it. If any swore rashly, without knowing in what they were involving themselves, they were responsible, and must consider themselves as having sinned, and must report the matter to the priest and bring an offering for atonement.—Lev. 5:1-13.

The argument is often put forward that while it may not be advisable to make a vow or take an oath to do evil, it is desirable to make vows to do good works or observe beneficial rules. But the Lord did not so regard the matter. Obviously the Jew must not swear rashly to do evil; but he was equally forbidden to swear rashly to do good. (Lev. 5:4.) The reason of this regulation was no doubt to keep them faithful to the Law and its regulations, instead of devising practices of their own.

So now it is with the Christian. In taking a vow to carry out some good work or to observe rules of conduct which seem to him good (whether the vow is his own devising or recommended to him by another brother), he runs the risk of interfering with the will of God concerning him, and should go to the Lord for pardon. No matter how right and good and desirable the thing may appear at the time, there may be some catch in it. some compromise which one would later on be glad to be free from. And then comes a more subtle temptation still, in an appeal to pride, which may prevent one acknowledging his mistake and repudiating his vow. And so he may go on getting entangled more and more in the meshes of self and Satan.

It was in the interest of the Jew to confine himself to the vows prescribed in the Law, which consisted in the bringing of himself or his possessions as free-will offerings to the Lord. While there was no display, there was no secrecy in these vows, for they were brought to the priest to be offered on the Lord's altar. The giver was acting throughout in obedience to the Lord's directions, and consequently received the Lord's blessing. Of this offering of vows in the court of the tabernacle David said—

"I will go into thy house with burnt offerings; I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble. I will offer unto thee burnt sacrific-

es of fatlings, with the incense of rams; I will offer bullocks with goats."—Psa. 66:13.

"I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people, in *the courts of the lord's house*, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. . . ."—Psa. 116:18: 19.

## No Merit in Vows

Sometimes the people came to regard their voluntary offerings as of merit, to be substituted for obedience. Saul made the mistake of thinking the Lord would appreciate a gift of cattle he had been told to destroy. Samuel rebuked him, saying, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Evidently it was not that God preferred obedience to the regular sacrifices he had appointed, for the people obeyed God in offering them. But he preferred obedience to voluntary offerings not offered in accordance with his regulations. Cursed was the deceiver who made a vow and offered to the Lord a corrupt thing, and thus insulted the great King and Lord of hosts.—1 Sam. 13:8-13; 15:18-23 : Mai. 1: 13, 14.

Whatever the Lord commanded the Jews in the Law required no oath or vow on their part, the simple agreement. Whatsoever the Lord hath spoken that will we do, being sufficient. Thus when the Law said, Thou shalt not kill, it did not require each individual Jew to take a solemn vow and oath never to kill. All that was required was *obedience* to a known command of Jehovah. An exception to this was recorded in Ezra's day. A number of the returned captives, including priests and Levites, having transgressed the Law by marrying foreign women, they gave their band in oath to put them away, according to Ezra's directions, and they offered sacrifices in token of their repentance.—Ezra 10:5, 19).

So now with Christians. It is neither necessary nor profitable for them to burden themselves with various vows and oaths, but rather that they shall *obey implicitly* the commands of the Lord. These commands are contained in the Scriptures, and if they are to be our guide we must be free to follow unencumbered by man-made devices. Laying aside every weight, and the easily besetting or close-girding sin. which is unbelief, let us run with patience the race set before us. *looking unto Jesus*, the author of the terms of our salvation, and not looking back on our own vows made with imperfect knowledge or under pressure. When we look unto Jesus for directions, we find that He said—"Let your communication be, Yea. yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."—Matt. 5:37.

If therefore we wish to give ourselves wholly to the Lord, we need not take a vow that we *are going to do it*, we need but to say. "Yea, Lord. I will follow in the footsteps of Jesus, thy grace helping me," and then *begin at once to do it*. Since there is no command in the New Testament to take vows, and since the Lord did not himself (so far at least as recorded) take vows, following in the Lord's footsteps does not require the believer to take them. Our Lord said, "Lo, I come, to do they will, O God," and "Not my will but thine be done." These statements were all comprehensive. They are an example to us. And it is to those who will to do the will of God that the Lord has promised to show his doctrine.—John 7:17.

## New Year Endeavors

Suppose then three persons standing on the threshold of the New Year—a babe in Christ, requiring "milk" and the care and guidance of older Christians; a mature Christian, with senses exercised by reason of use, and an old man or woman in the faith whose course is nearly finished. Is it advisable for any or all of them to make good resolutions?

We should say Yes. But in making "good" resolutions it is necessary to be sure, first of all, that they are *good*; which means, that they are in harmony with the will of God. We should *not*, however, advise anyone to put off till the first day of the new year the making of any good resolutions which may occur to the mind on any given day, for every day to the Christian is a devoted day, and should be lived as nearly perfect as possible. To resolve on rising to be cheerful, kind to family and friends, courteous to all; to control the irritability and temper which mar the happiness of so many homes, is a great help in the careful living of the day, because it directs the mind in right channels and encourages self control. But there are special occasions when special resolutions seem to be in order, such as birthdays, recovery from serious illness, the receipt of a legacy or extra prosperity in business, as well as on religious occasions, such as the Memorial anniversary, the anniversary of one's conversion, or when undertaking some service for the Lord. Of the last-named we have a good example in the Apostle Paul, who wrote to the Corinthians— "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."— 1 Cor. 2:1, 2.

Such a resolution or determination would be a help to the Apostle personally, impressing upon himself the worthlessness of worldly wisdom, and concentrating his mind on the gospel message which it was his mission to preach. It would also have a good effect on the style of his preaching, making it clear cut and direct, and finally it would be an advantage to the people who heard, for they would be convinced of his sincerity and be led to consider his message. Similarly to the Galatians he wrote, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."—Gal. 6:14.

Concerning a later visit to the Corinthians he wrote, "I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness." These words shew that he had been considering conditions at Corinth and the best course for him to pursue in view of those conditions. He therefore had written "out of much affliction and anguish of heart." And with "many tears." that the evils might be corrected. and that he might conic to them with joy instead of grieu—2 Cor. 2:3-10.

## Resolving to do God's Will

We may safely resolve, or make up our minds, or determine, to be or do anything which the Lord in His Word commands us to be or to do. It should therefore be our daily pleasure to search out the Lord's commands, and to fulfill them to the best of our ability with the aid of His Spirit. It is wonderful how the principles laid down in the Word help us to decide doubtful matters in our lives; how they help us to avoid snares and pitfalls, and enable us when temptations almost overwhelm us to come off

more than conquerors through Him who loved us. But this help will not be received by us if we do not go to the Scriptures where the help is found. Standing at the beginning of a New Year, all Christians, the advanced as well as the young, may determine to read the Scriptures more, to study them more carefully; to be more obedient to their instructions; to walk more circumspectly; to cultivate more zealously the fruits of the Spirit; to lay off more completely the deeds of the flesh or "old man"; to be more loving and kind and unselfish, in imitation of the Master; to run with more patience the race; to be more diligent in the spread of the Gospel truth; to make greater sacrifices of time, strength and means, counting all things but loss and dross, and the cross of Christ the only cause for boasting.

As one cannot succeed in a day in developing from a more or less helpless "babe" in Christ to full grown strength and power, one has need of patience and perseverance and oft-repeated resolutions. We have said that it is advisable to make good resolutions even if they be soon broken. The reason is that no one can accomplish anything either good or bad without first more or less *making up his mind* on the subject. No one can partake of food unless he make up his mind to be at meal time where the food is provided; no one can succeed in business unless he make up his mind to rise in the morning and to perform certain duties; no one can become a scholar unless he make up his mind to undertake the required course of studies. Similarly anyone wishing to be a Christian must *make up his mind* to be one and must resolve to go about it in accordance with the instructions of the Apostles. Having made up his mind in a general way, he must then make up his mind on specific points, just as a student makes up his mind to learn each individual lesson in the school curriculum.

## Cultivating and Cutting Off

To make up one's mind to pursue a course in one direction compels one also to make up his mind to cut off any tendency to travel in another direction. When Paul determined to preach nothing save Christ and Him crucified he cut off any natural tendency that might have lingered in him to preach Judaism or to preach himself. In our day to preach Christ and Him crucified means to avoid preaching on a thousand other subjects.

Similarly in the cultivation of the Christian virtues. To resolve to be more kind and forbearing in our dealings with family and friends means equally to resolve to cut off the tendency to hasty words and retaliation. To resolve to make home cheerful by the exhibition of a bright and happy disposition means to resolve to cut off the tendency to moroseness, jealousy and general meanness.

The cause of so many failures in carrying out good resolutions is the non-recognition of this double action. Resolutions are made to be kind and good, but the corresponding resolution to cut off the faults that make the trouble is overlooked. Or one may resolve to overcome a quarrelsome disposition and yet fail to make up one's mind to relinquish the satisfaction of always having the last word. Another cause of failure is the omission to ask the Lord's help in overcoming. Prayer is essential. Another is neglect to associate with believers or to attend Bible classes. One cannot expect success in the Christian life if one's companions and friends are of another turn of mind and continually suggesting *other* modes of spending the time.—Matt.

26:41; Heb. 10:25.

Still another cause of failure is setting the affections on things on the earth instead of in heaven: thus soon becoming overcharged with the affairs of this life and the deceitfulness of riches. The Lord is a jealous God, and wants our whole heart. He will not give the heavenly inheritance to those who do not value it above a little present gratification or worldly ease.

### Plans for the Future

Resolutions to be and do what the Lord commands may be freely made and zealously carried out. Those who are not giving all their time to the spread of the truth, and are therefore more or less under obligation to plan the future for themselves and families, business, etc., are often tempted to leave the Lord out of their calculations. To them James issues a warning—"Go to now, ye that say. To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain; whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life.' It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that, ye ought to say. *If the Lord will*, we shall live, and do this, or that. Rut now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil."—James 4: 13-16.

"If the Lord will, we shall do this or that," is the New Testament rule for Christians to follow in planning the future. Only

thus can the Lord be honored in the daily life; only thus can one be assured of His overruling care and directing providence; only thus can one be safe from the lure of riches and the secret machinations of the enemy of our souls. It is a good rule also in making plans in Christian work, as illustrated in Paul's plans to visit Corinth. "I *trust* to tarry awhile with you, *if the Lord permit*." (1 Cor. 16:7.) To the Ephesians he said, "I will return again unto you, *if God will*."—Acts 18:21.

The Apostle Paul said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." (1 Cor. 11:1.) In the endeavor to do this, we will find that Paul had learned many things which it would be profitable for us to learn. He learned to be content in whatsoever state he found Himself so long he had the satisfaction of preaching the gospel—he knew how to abound and how to suffer want, how to use his liberty effectively and how to make use even of a prison. And no doubt his whole-hearted determination to preach the gospel at all cost to himself assisted in the development of his character and kept him in the frame of mind to profit by every trial and disappointment. So may it be with us the coming year. May we resolve to serve the Lord more devotedly than ever before, to sacrifice self more thoroughly, to love the brethren more sincerely. And let us add, If God will, we will spend more time this year in the great harvest field than we have done in the past—reaping the wheat now standing ripe and ready for the sickle of truth.

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“Promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another.”- Psalm 75:6,7

WE may have desires and aspirations for usefulness which will never be gratified. The Lord may see that we could not bear the exaltation and honor which we seek. He knows far better than we do what is for our good, and so He would have us rest contented in His providence, not idle, but diligent; not careless, but watchful; not indifferent, but full of intense, earnest longing to do the will of God; yet patient under restraint, and content to be neglected and forgotten, remembering that "they also serve who only stand and wait," and that the Lord in His own well-chosen hour can lead us forth to fulfil His purposes of grace.

R1756:5

## 2009 Memorial Supper Date

The proper date and time for the annual observance of the Lord's Memorial Supper will be Tuesday, April 7, 2009, after 6:00 p.m.