

Psalm 130:5-8

Midweek Advent 1, Dec. 6, '23
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I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, And in His word I do hope. ⁶ My soul waits for the Lord More than those who watch for the morning-- Yes, more than those who watch for the morning. ⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is mercy, And with Him is abundant redemption. ⁸ And He shall redeem Israel From all his iniquities.

Do you use a lot of passwords? I'm sure many of you use email or social media from time to time, and you use a password to log onto your accounts. That's what passwords do, they give you access. Perhaps you've seen them used in old war movies, too. The password is the word that soldiers would use in order to prove that they are who they say they are. For instance, in World War II, Allied forces would use passwords as they approached checkpoints to let the sentry know they were friendly. The sentry would shout out, "Flash," and the appropriate password in response was, "Thunder." Answer with the password, and you were allowed to continue on. So, a password is a word that helps you *get into* the place you want to go.

Well, this is the time of year when a lot of us are beginning to "get into" Christmas. It's hard not to! The air is turning frigid, frost is on the ground in the morning, Christmas music is on the radio, and every store is having their Christmas sales. As Christians, however, we know that the true meaning of Christmas lies deeper than these things. It's a special place. We've been there before, and we want to go back again this year. This morning, we've got a special password that will help us "get into" the real Christmas again. **Today's Password is "Watch."**

Imagine this scene. You've decided to go to the store to do a little shopping. You know it's going to be crowded this time of year. As you enter, however, you sense that something is different; something is very strange. Walking down the aisles, you notice, to your amazement, that all the people are asleep! There are shoppers slumbering on benches, store clerks dozing over their cash registers, cart attendants slumped in the entryway. Instead of the noise of a crowded department store, the only sound you hear is that of a few people snoring as they sleep. That would be a strange sight!

Well, the really strange thing is that most of the people around us *are* asleep. Asleep on their feet as they go about their Christmas shopping. Asleep as they hang ornaments from their Christmas trees. They're asleep, even while they *think* they know what Christmas is all about! "It's a time of sharing, a time of peace; a time of family togetherness," people think. And with no mention of Jesus at all, how empty and pointless Christmas sounds! Our text on the other hand says, ***"I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, And in His word I do hope. My soul waits for the Lord More than those who watch for the morning-- Yes, more than those who watch for the morning."*** The Psalmist was waiting for Christmas too! Not the commercial holiday, the real Christmas—the coming of the Lord, the promised Messiah. He wasn't asleep. No, he was as wide awake as ***"those who watch for the morning."***

Have you ever done that before? "Watched for the morning"? Maybe you've sat up through the night with someone who was sick, waiting for the morning to come? Or maybe you've been on a roadtrip, driving all night long, feeling weary and waiting for the sun to finally come up in the east? One thing you can always be absolutely certain of is that the morning *will* come. At some point you know the sun will crest over the horizon. And that's the certainty that the Psalmist had as he wrote these words. He knew that his Savior was on His way, just as surely as the morning always follows the night.

And that's why he watched with confidence. It was a confidence based on God's Word, and God's Word cannot fail! And that's the same confidence that can we have this Advent. We **watch** with confidence. We know that, as surely as December 25th will soon arrive, our Savior too is on His way. Our Redeemer is coming into our hearts again, to strengthen our faith with true Christmas joy.

The Psalmist watched for the coming of the Lord not only with confidence but also with *desire*. He could hardly wait for that first Christmas to come, even though it was still 600 years away! He said, ***"My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning."*** He was probably thinking of the guards who patrolled the walls of Jerusalem during the dark hours of the night. We can imagine the lonely soldier, cold and tired, pacing up and down the length of the wall, wary of every noise of the still night—watching, waiting, *longing* for morning to finally come!

Are you watching for Christmas that way? Longing for the Christ-child to come? Children often can't wait for Christmas to get here, to bring them the presents they've been hoping for. But we can long for Christmas to come in a different way. Sure, we *do* look forward to the giving and sharing of the holiday season. We *do* look forward to getting together with our relatives and loved ones. But the heart of our desire for Christmas is *Christ*! We join with the Prophet Isaiah, saying, ***"With my soul I have desired You in the night, yes, by my spirit within me I will seek You early."*** (Isaiah 26:9)

Jesus is the real gift we are seeking during this happy time. And as the days grow shorter, and the Christmas lights appear around town, the Baby of Bethlehem is the Relative we're most looking forward to meeting! That is what the Psalmist was looking forward to also, he tells us exactly that. ***"O Israel, hope in the LORD; for with the LORD there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."*** He felt that desperate need for forgiveness.

That need for a Savior exists today, too. Probably more than at any other time in human history! Most people don't know that, of course. Because most of the people around us are asleep—covered with drowsy complacency in their sinful lifestyles, sleepwalking their way to eternal destruction. But there's something that keeps us awake and watching, something that just won't let us sleep. We know our need for a Savior! We feel the crushing burden of our sins. We cry out with David: ***"There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor is there any health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me."*** (Psalm 38:4)

That's why we're watching for Christmas. Because the coming of Jesus means sweet relief from all our sins. We could relate to the feelings of a condemned prisoner on death row. As the time of his execution comes closer and closer, he watches at the door of his cell, waiting for any news of pardon—any hope of release. And we are watching for the coming of Jesus. He opens that door and brings with Him pardon for all our iniquities, release from the condemnation we deserve. What a happy day it is we are looking forward to! Because Christmas means forgiveness and freedom to us!

So, the Advent password is **"Watch."** Let's be wide awake and watching for the coming of Jesus this year. When you're out doing your Christmas shopping, and you hear the music playing, maybe *"Joy to the World"* comes on the speakers, remember Who it is that brings us that joy, and give thanks to God. In the midst of the world's godless celebration, let's keep that watch, and remind ourselves again that the first word in Christmas is Christ! Thanks be to God for this most precious gift. Amen.