

Dear Friends in Christ,

When I was reading through the text for this morning and came to the words of Hagar, “Truly here I have seen him who looks after me.”, the title from the old George Gershwin song, “Someone To Watch Over Me”, came to mind. I could remember some of the tune from childhood days, but few of the lyrics. I looked them up. Some of the first words are these: “There is a saying old, says that love is blind/ Still we’re often told ‘seek and ye shall find’/...”.

The sarcasm hit! I thought to myself, “I forgot! Gershwin, as with so many other celebrities of the past and present, was a theologian!” And the sarcasm turned to silliness when I thought, “I wonder why he didn’t write, “**Jesus said**, ‘seek and ye shall find’ instead of “we’re often told, ‘seek and ye shall find’”?

Regardless, I’m going to use his title with a modification . . .

SOMEONE TO TRULY WATCH OVER ME

I. The Background.

If we back up to the first verses of Genesis 16 we’re told,

Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, “Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.” (vss. 1-2)

And so, began a messy situation. Hagar gave birth to Ishmael. And we’re told, “(Hagar) looked with contempt on (Sarai).” (vs. 4b) And Sarai, who had pushed for this situation, said to Abram, “May the wrong done to me be on you!” (vs. 5) She blames her husband and runs Hagar out of their presence. Our text then reports, “The angel of the Lord found (Hagar) by a spring of water in the wilderness”. He tells her to return to Sarai and promises that the child she will bring into the world (Ishmael, which means “God hears”) will be the beginning of a great multitude of people. And, then, Hagar’s response to this: “So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, ‘You are a God of seeing,’ for she said, ‘Truly here I have seen him who looks after me.’” (vs. 13)

We know that the descendants of Ishmael would be a source of conflict for the Israelites, God’s chosen people. But the point is this: Regardless of who or what a person is, or a nation is, God watches. Nothing escapes His attention, movement and design. Nothing! Not the earth, this country, this government, this state, this city, the people in this Sanctuary. Nothing!

The 17th century philosopher and inventor, Robert Boyle made this observation: “God beholds at once all that every one of His creatures, whether visible or invisible to us.... either does or thinks.”

II. The Reality for Us.

What we have to grasp is how this translates into the lives of God’s people; specifically, those who rally around the Cross and Empty Tomb of Jesus thirsty for Christ’ mercy, love, forgiveness and assurance of eternal life.

I read that in ancient times there was a form of punishment in which a prisoner was placed in a very, very narrow cell. The door was solid, except for a small opening. On the other side of the opening guards kept constant watch on the prisoner, 24/7! No matter what the prisoner did, he could not escape the presence of the eye that watched his every move. Can you imagine that? To never be able to escape that kind of suspicious and critical presence?

But that's not the way it is for those who know the love of God. In fact, it's just the other way around. We want Him to keep watch over us. David writes, "For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty (the blatantly proud) he knows from afar." (Ps. 138:6) And you might ask, "What does it mean, 'the haughty he knows from afar'?" It has been noted that "the haughty are persons who are self-sufficient and believe that they can well do without the Almighty." (H. C. Leuphold, "Exposition of the Psalms," Baker Book House, p. 941) It's another way of saying, "Though He knows and sees everything about them, He does not see them in the light of His mercy."

Another way of stating the case is this from Isaiah - words God speaks to the lowly - His people: "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you..." (Is. 66:13a) That's the comfort the haughty will never experience without true repentance. God watches over His children as a loving mother watches over her child or children.

And here's where all this takes us . . .

III. Where All This Takes Us.

These most comforting words of the Lord through David:

The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those crushed in spirit. (Ps. 34:16-18)

"When the righteous cry for help." Who are the righteous? They are those who trust in Christ as their covering for sin; as the One and only One Who has earned forgiveness and eternal life for them. As Paul writes, "For in it (in the Gospel; the Good News of God's gift of forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ) (in it) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" (Rom. 1:17)

This is not for the self-righteous; for those who think God owes them because they're good enough. This is for those who see their sin and need for a covering for sin. Thus, David says, "the Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those crushed in spirit." That is, those **broken** by the struggles with sin and guilt - **crushed** by sin, guilt, sufferings and the disappointments of life. Crushed! Squeezed! Boxed in! Can't move! Ever been there? Are you there, now? I know that some of you are.

Always remember: God does not take away the many things we must endure. As Scriptures teach, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all." (Ps. 34:19) That deliverance might come through God ending the affliction. It might come through God giving the individual the strength to endure it for a multitude of reasons. And the deliverance might come through the person's entrance into eternal life; the greatest deliverance!

But, there's one more thought here . . .

IV. And Directs Our Steps.

The prophet Jeremiah prayed: "I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps." (Jer. 10:23) Everybody likes to think they're in control - in charge of their way through this world. But, they're not. This earth is not - this country is not - this government is not - this state is not - this city is not - you are not - and neither am I!

Look! If David recognized the truth in these words: "You know when I sit down and when I rise; you discern my thoughts from afar (before I think them)... Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before..." - if David recognized the truth of those words, then we must, as well. (Psalm 139: portions of 3-5)

And with these Words of God through David we connect this Word of God: "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord established (or, determines) his steps." (Prov. 16:9) That's a powerful revelation, isn't it? We're not moving through this world alone, even when others abandon us. We're not moving through this world unloved, even when others have turned away. We're not moving through this world thinking that no-one hears our cries or sees our lost moments; that no one cares.

It's always there - in front of us - not hidden or obscured by faulty human wisdom. It's always there: the Cross of Christ. "For God so loved the world..." says it: God loved and loves the world, and that includes each of us. Individually! I like the way Martin Luther put it: "God does not give grace freely in the sense that He will demand no satisfaction, but He gave Christ to be the satisfaction for us." Each person here!

And it all adds up - everything we've considered this day - it all adds up: There is Someone Who truly watches over us. He always there; in the Word, the Sacraments, the day to day occurrences of life. He's always there: **Our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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Genesis 16:7-13: ***“Someone To Truly Watch Over Me”***

I. The Background.

II. The Reality for Us.

III. Where All This Takes Us.

IV. And Directs Our Steps.

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