

# 'AWAKE THOU THAT SLEEPEST'

## Sermon

**“Wherefore, he saith, Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.”**

In fuller context, from Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, chapter five, verses 11 through 16:

**And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reprovèd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.**

In this chapter the Apostle has been reminding his Ephesian converts of the state in which they were, before they had received and obeyed the call of the gospel. The people of Ephesus were highly endowed, in the world's estimation, not only with riches, but also with talent and learning, and refinement; with all the arts and ornaments of civilized life. And yet, how does St. Paul describe them in the 8th verse? "Ye were sometimes darkness;" how in the 12th? "For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret."

Here, you observe, we have a remarkable declaration from the mouth of an Apostle, that a people, however talented and learned, were still wrapt in the mantle of darkness, with regard to their real good and happiness; with regard to their religious and moral condition. Whatever nature had done for them, to whatever eminence they had been raised by art or industry, they were left far short of the object which it concerned them most to attain—an acquaintance with God, a knowledge and practice of His law; a peace with Him and with their own consciences. So far were they from this, that their characters were stained with the most

debasing vices; their secret sins were too abominable even to be mentioned.

Thus we see how little the instructions and advantages of this world have to do with reforming the conduct, or amending the depraved heart of man. And what was true in this instance, is true in all; there is no teaching, there are no rules of prudence, no maxims however wise, no manners however polished, that can cleanse the heart of its natural unrighteousness, and curb its natural propensity to evil: give what you may, educate as you may, man, if left to his own wisdom and strength, will remain what he is by fallen nature, a weak, a wayward, and a wicked being; an enemy to holiness and to God. There may be a shew of wisdom “falsely so called;” there may be a refined conversation and a polished outside; but there will always be uncleanness remaining within. The evil principles may wear a dazzling veil, and the vices may be clothed in fashionable garments, but they will be evil principles and vices still.

There is but one means by which the darkness of nature can be scattered, and that is by the light of

God's truth; but one means by which the evil spirit of the natural man can be cast out, and that is by the Spirit of God. The blessed Jesus came into the world to reclaim and redeem it from the grossness in which it was sunk; to open a new scene of things; to impart a new life; to banish the thick cloud of error and of sin, in which the world hopelessly and irrecoverably lay; and to raise it to the knowledge and service, the favour and blessing of an offended God. This is the description of the happy effects which the gospel is intended and fitted to produce; "the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." All, without the gospel, are in this miserable condition, whatever they may think of themselves: all who sincerely embrace it, are enlightened and happy, however poor and humble, and of whatever else they may be ignorant.

Poor and humble did I say? It is to them, that this light is the most easily, and frequently, and effectually communicated. The prosperous and the great too often resemble the wealthy Ephesians, "having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the

ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;” revelling in the self-sufficiency of their earthly comforts, proud of their acquirements, fond of their own way, they disdain to be taught the humbling truths of the gospel from a fellow-creature like themselves: and often has the minister of the gospel to be thankful to his Lord and Master, that, when he finds his message rejected and despised by his wealthier hearers, it still makes its way into the hearts of some of the poor: grieved he is indeed, that those, who ought to know it best and love it most, should be so deluded by worldly vanities and follies, as to continue, amidst all their advantages of education, in spiritual darkness and death; set against the messenger, because hating the truth of his message: yet, is it a comfort to him, sincere and unspeakable, that he meets with more success among the ignorant, as they are called, and the children of the poor: that there he finds wisdom, “the wisdom which is from above;” and there he finds friends among the friends of God.

It was so in the Apostle’s day; and with some bright exceptions, it has been the same in every day: “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many

mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things that are mighty: and base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.”

All these observations have been made, to connect and explain the first word of the text, wherefore; “wherefore, he saith, awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” Inasmuch as it is impossible for thee to know and to please God, to attain unto holiness and happiness, to save thy soul, by the light of nature, (for nature is in fact, of itself and for such a purpose, no light at all,) turn to the way, which is opened to thee by the shining of the Sun of Righteousness; to that one way, which is opened alike for all mankind, rich and poor, learned and unlearned; turn to thy Redeemer, in humble faith and hearty desire, and “He shall give thee light:” learn of Him and He shall teach thee all that thou needest to know: seek of Him, and He shall guide thee into all righteousness and truth; lean on Him, and He shall support thee, through all the course

of thy earthly pilgrimage; and conduct thee in peace and safety to thy journey's end.

“Wherefore, he saith;” there is no particular passage in the Old Testament, in which these words of the text are found; but they seem to allude to several expressions of similar import, in the prophecy of Isaiah. In the 26th chapter, there is a passage which describes the deliverance of God's people from a state of degradation, both political and spiritual, under the figure of a resurrection from the dead: “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.” And again, in the 52nd chapter: “Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the Holy city; for henceforth there shall no more come in to thee the uncircumcised and the unclean; shake thyself from the dust; arise and sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion: for thus saith the Lord, ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money:” a powerful call upon the Jewish people to cast away their transgressions, through which they had been

brought into a state of grievous captivity, and to throw themselves on the Lord's mercy, and return to the Lord's service, that He might break their bonds asunder, and visit them with His salvation. One more passage there is, to which the Apostle clearly alludes, in the opening of the 60th chapter: "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee." Here the prophet foretels the glorious dawn of gospel light, and calls upon the Church to arise and behold it, shining from afar; to behold it with the eye of faith; to look forward to that Saviour, that great "fountain for sin and uncleanness," which the law and the prophets did all with one voice proclaim. The prophet adds, "And the gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." The first coming of the gentile world was visible in the footsteps of the wise men, who came "from the east to Jerusalem," to worship the infant Jesus: and ever since our Lord's return to the heavens, the gospel has been preached to all nations; and accepted, more or less, by the kings and potentates of the earth.



And, as the prophet called on the people of old, to awake and arise and turn to the coming light, so St. Paul invited and animated his converts and their brethren, to awake and behold the glory of the Lord, after it had been fully revealed to the dark and sinful world; and so do the ministers of Christ, in every age, call upon their hearers to arouse from their benighted and lost condition, and let this light shine upon their understandings and hearts, and direct them in the way of life and salvation. For grieved are we to say, that notwithstanding these bright beams of grace and truth have been so long pouring forth their splendour upon the earth, yet are there many dark corners; and many eyes awfully closed against the light: and still more grieved are we to say, that even in the land where these beams have shone brightest, even in this land, vast numbers yet remain total strangers to their enlightening influence and converting power: numbers who have had the benefit of being educated under the gospel, who have witnessed its happy effects; who have seen what it has done for their relations, or friends, or neighbours, have yet ungratefully and disdainfully turned away from the heavenly light, and “walked on still in darkness;” have sided with the world and Satan and sin, and resisted the salvation of their souls, that they could be

brought, O for the grace of God's Holy Spirit to bring them, to listen to the warning words of that merciful Saviour, to whom, if they now continue to despise Him, they will one day lift up their hands in vain: these are His words, "if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness." If, after all the gracious offers of pardon and life, which thy Redeemer has made thee, by His own mouth, and the mouth of His messengers, thou still chooseth unforgiveness and death, going on in the heedlessness of thy impenitent heart, and wantoning in sin, how dreadful is thy condition! how infinitely more dreadful, than if the voice of mercy had never sounded in thine ears. Be convinced: let the love of thy Saviour work upon thee; let the love of thine own immortal soul move thee to fly unto Him, the great, the only, the everlasting Redeemer. Leave thy way of misery and ruin, and turn to Him for comfort and deliverance. Turn, while thou hast the power; the night is fast coming. Thou knowest not how many more sabbaths, how many more invitations and warnings, will be vouchsafed: many thou hast had already; enough of them thou hast already slighted. Come, ye that are strong, for the strong are often laid low; come, ye that are young, for the young are not always spared; come, ye aged, for your hour of trial must be nearly run out. Come

all, while ye may, to the Lamb of God, for acceptance and for blessing: there is no safety, and no hope in any other: and no hope in Him, when the door is once shut; “we pray you, in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

The text says, “Awake thou that sleepest;” it means, awake from the sleep of sin; and very fitly is the state of the sinner compared to a state of sleep: he is quite insensible of his true, his awful condition; he fears not, perceives not, the doom that is awaiting him. Satan has bound up his senses; the eyes of his understanding are closed, and his knowledge of good and evil is utterly prevented. He is to the spiritual world, what the sleeping man is to the natural, unconscious of what is going forward to his advantage or his injury. Speak to him of mercy, he hears not: “sing him one of the songs of Sion,” it is all in vain: speak to him of divine wrath, of eternal punishment; to what purpose, while his ear is closed? The whispers of conscience, the counsel of friends, “the tongues of men or of angels,” are alike unprofitable, while a deep sleep is cast upon the soul.

And there is a further resemblance: the sinner dreams, of happiness arising from worldly prosperity, from plenty and pleasure: and as the brain of a poor or disconsolate man, in a state of sleep, is often filled with ideas of such things, and he awakes and finds them sadly untrue; awakes from his pleasant dreaming to his state of drudgery and discomfort; so is the sinner often constrained to feel and confess, that his notions of happiness were no better than a dream; that they were unsubstantial and unreal, promising much and bringing little: still he is unconvinced; pursues his course of trifling, his disappointed dreamings, till at length he awakes in another world, and thoroughly perceives the wretchedness of his condition, which it is then too late, impossible to change. From this dreadful, fatal sleep of sin, the gospel is designed to rouse us: and I pray God, that our conscience may be effectually alarmed and awakened; that we may be alive and active in perceiving and following “the things that belong unto our peace!”

The text says further, “Arise from the dead;” from the death of sin; from the state of misery and ruin, in which ye insensibly lie. Here is another significant figure: the impenitent sinner is not

only plunged into a condition of helpless wretchedness, but he has no energy to recover from it, no quickening or effectual desire of better things; no more perception of spiritual interests, of heavenly objects, than a corpse has of the natural world. When once the breath has left the body, the busiest scenes of earth can affect it no longer; nothing can “charm the dull cold ear of death:” when the breath of a divine life is not in the soul, when the new-creating spirit of God is not received and cherished, the beauty of holiness and the all-important interests of a spiritual and eternal world produce no effect upon the forlorn understanding and the deserted heart: no representations of spiritual truth can move the heavy ear of a besotted and determined sinner; none, while he is resolved, so to remain: not even the voice of the Son of God, “charm He never so wisely.” Till the heart be moved to repentance, till, the faculties of the soul are recovered from the fascination of stupor and sin, no living impression can be made, even with all the force that truth can carry. How often do we find this to be the case! how often does the sinner acknowledge the justice, the certainty, the necessity of what is urged upon him, but without any alteration in his character; without any effectual or lasting alteration. His heart is unchanged: the slave of sin;

dead in sin; not alive or open to the force of truth, to the doctrines of righteousness or salvation.

Infatuated sinner! thine own conscience accuses thee; thou believest that there will be a world to come, a world of recompence, and yet thou turnest not to prepare for it; pray, when thou fearest; pray, when thou thinkest of these things; cry earnestly to thy Saviour, that he may deliver thee from this “gall of bitterness and this bond of iniquity;” pray for the convincing, converting, life-giving Spirit, that He may “set thine heart at liberty” from the thralldom of sin; and thus enable thee to listen to the call of the gospel, and turn thy feet in earnest to the Redeemer of thy soul. For if thou listenest and turnest not, “dead thou art while thou livest;” and when thou diest, eternally dead; dead to all comfort and happiness for ever; dead in a world of woe.

But if we will (and God grant that we all may) awake and arise, “Christ will assuredly give us light:” “He is the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world;” ready to shine upon every soul, to lighten it in darkness and quicken it in death. Believe in Him, and live in

Him, and the clouds of ignorance shall be scattered away; and the drowsiness of the soul shall be cast off; and the cold heart of the natural man shall be warm with life again. In the midst of this world's temptations and trials, troubles and perplexities, we shall see our way clear, our way to the heavenly Jerusalem; a brightness, the brightness of God's presence, will be resting upon our souls; the world sees it not, but we shall see and enjoy it every hour: dark things will be made light, and "crooked things will be made straight, and the rough places plain:" we shall be living above the world, for "our life will be hid with Christ in God:" cheerful we shall be when nature is sad: inspirited when nature is languishing; full of praises and thanksgivings when nature is mourning.

Say, Christian people, have ye never seen the triumph of faith over nature's weakness and Satan's power? have ye never, in the hour of trial, witnessed that the Saviour was near? never observed the fainting spirit animated and sustained? never beheld the closing eye, of the dying saint, beaming with heavenly fire; and the pale features lighted up with the smile of satisfaction and composure and peace? If ye have

not, the dying Christian will shew you these things—go to his bed, and learn the lesson; go, and catch the hope, that “Christ will give you light.”

END OF SERMON

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