

Asleep and Yet Awake—a Riddle

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that though believers may experience spiritual slumber and imperfection, the awakened heart listens for the voice of Christ, urging continual self-examination, repentance, and faithful pursuit of holiness.

Scripture: Song of Solomon 5:2, Ephesians 5:26-27, Psalm 51:3, Matthew 25:5, Mark 14:37-38, Proverbs 22:13

Topics: "Spiritual Awakening", "Sanctification", "Christian Perseverance"

Description

In this devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the paradox of the believer who confesses spiritual slumber yet remains inwardly awake to the voice of Christ. Drawing from the Song of Solomon and other Scripture, Spurgeon encourages self-examination, warns against complacency, and exhorts believers to follow Christ's example rather than imperfect saints. This message offers comfort to those struggling with spiritual dullness while urging a renewed pursuit of holiness and vigilance.

Transcript

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

"I sleep, but my heart is awake: it is the voice of my Beloved that knocks." Song of Solomon 5:2.

WE are glad to perceive in this Song the varied experience of the bride. She was the well-beloved of the heavenly Bridegroom, but she was not without her faults. Though the "fairest among women," she was human and, therefore, she had not reached angelical perfection. She was not perfect, to begin with, for at the outset she confessed, "I am black, because the sun has looked upon me: they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but my own vineyard have I not kept." She was not perfect even in the exhibition of her love to Him who had chosen her, for she has to acknowledge, as upon the occasion before us, that she treated Him in an unworthy manner. She kept Him waiting at her door in the chilly night and grieved Him so that He withdrew. She was not perfect, even, to the end of the chapter, for she could not hear her Lord's voice so clearly as certain of her companions and she cried in the last chapter of her Song, "Cause me to hear it."

Brothers and Sisters, we shall not be able to claim entire perfection so long as we are this side the hills of division. Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away, our Lord will have to sanctify and cleanse His spouse "with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." We are glad, I say, to have the experience of the spouse—that

is, of the Church as a whole—because we know that as is the Church, such are the members and the rule that holds good for the whole will be found in its measure and proportion to be fulfilled in all its parts. We, too, have to say, "I am black, because the sun has looked upon me."

And at times we have to ask, "Why should I be as one that turns aside by the flocks of your companions?" We have had mournfully to cry, "I sought Him, but I could not find Him; I called Him, but He gave me no answer," while the watchmen have justly smitten us and wounded us for our neglect of our Lord. Let us bless God that in the Book of revealed Truth He has not merely given us the ideal standard after which we are to seek, but He has also preserved for us the humbler patterns of those who have strived to reach to the utmost height and who have climbed a good way towards it, but who, nevertheless, have proved that, though they were the best of men, they were men at the best. Thus our Lord has saved us from despair by making us to know that we may be sincere and true and accepted, though we, too, fall short as yet of the holiness which we pant after with our whole hearts.

Nor are we only favored with the poetic story of the bride—we have, also, in the Word of God, the biographies of the saints, the memoirs of the godly and these are exceedingly useful to us. I fear we would not, Brothers and Sisters, at certain times, know whether we were God's people at all if we were not able to compare ourselves with others of the family. We may lose our way, sometimes, as poor sheep have often done and then, though the greatest comfort is derived from seeing the footprints of the Shepherd, yet no small measure of consolation is to be gained through marking the footsteps of the flock. The sight of human footsteps on the sandy waste has caused us to take heart again.

We have exclaimed, "Here one has been who was surely a child of God and since I am here, I may be a child of God, too. I have similar failings and weaknesses and I chide myself for them, but I will not utterly condemn myself and say I cannot be a Believer, for I perceive that these spots were on others of God's children, too." The perception of our likeness to others who were truly saints has often afforded us a spark of hope when we were in a maze and dared scarcely hope that we were right towards God. Frequently the experience of others will help us to thread our way when it winds and twists and we cannot see an inch before us.

The young man thinks that he understands himself, but no old man does. Ask the man who is best acquainted with himself and he will tell you that he is increasingly a riddle and that his experience becomes an enigma more profound every day. The Believer feels that he needs the help of the Divine Teacher to enable him to trace the thread of his spiritual life throughout all the tangle of the skein. It needs a Grace-taught man to make himself out and to comprehend what he is and where he

is and what is the very truth of his life's paradox. At times I ask myself, "Am I all sin, or is there yet a spark of Grace?" Soon Grace shines like the sun and then I almost dream that sin is extinct! We are driven to read ourselves in others. We look at the saints of Holy Scripture and, as we mark their lives, we say, "I can understand this man better than I can myself, for lookers-on see more than players. And now, by understanding him, I begin, also, to comprehend my own position. I calculate my latitude and longitude by observing a star. I estimate the contending influences that rage within me by seeing how others drifted, or stemmed the torrent. I see the strange convolutions of my intertwined soul in others and, as in a glass, I discern myself."

But, my Brothers and Sisters, we must take care that we do not wrongly use the memoirs of saints as recorded in Scrip-ture—they are not all for our imitation, but many of them for our warning! You may not

do all that a good man has done. If you were to copy certain of the actions of the most gracious men, you would soon find yourself more faulty than they, for you would be sure to throw the emphasis upon their errors—and their Graces you would probably miss. You would copy their faults and aggravate them. Follow no man where he does not follow Christ! Above all, the lives of the saints may never be used as an excuse for our faults. We shall not be justified in following afar off because Peter did so, nor in calling fire from Heaven upon our enemies because James and John wished to do so, nor in quarrelling because Paul and Barnabas fell into sore contention.

We may wisely quote David as an encouragement to a penitent, that God will forgive his sin, but not as an apology for ourselves should we be tempted to commit the sin. We must often use the saints of God as beacons rather than as harbor-lights—as lighthouses set upon rocky coasts to advise us of the dangers into which they fell. Take care that Holy Scripture is used for holy ends and that holy men are viewed as helps to holiness and not as excuses for imperfection. Let us learn from their virtues, imitation—but from their faults, warning—and from both, instruction. Judgment is profitable to direct. Follow the Lamb wherever He goes, but there is not a sheep of His flock to whom you may do the same. Do whatever Jesus does—copy the example of Christ in all its touches, so far as it is imitable—but do not the same even towards the beloved John, though his head is fresh from his Master's bosom—no, nor towards Paul, though he is not a whit behind the very chief of the Apostles.

We come, then, dear Friends, to use the example of our text with those limitations which we have thus set forth. We have in the text, first, slumber confessed—"I sleep." But over against this there is wakefulness claimed—"but my heart is awake." Very soon we have mystery solved—how is it that the heart stays awake?—"It is the voice of my Beloved that knocks." Before we close we shall try, fourthly, to have a lesson learned out of the text. May the Holy Spirit make the whole subject profitable to us and practically influential upon our lives.

I. First, then, here is SLUMBER CONFESSED. The spouse laments her state and sighs out, "I sleep." It strikes us at once that her sleep is a recognized state. We are astonished that she should say, "I sleep," and we conclude that it is not so profound a sleep as it might be, for when a man can say, "I sleep," he is not altogether steeped in slumber! When children of God perceive their own imperfections and mourn over them, there is evidently a root of virtue in them—when they perceive the decay of their Grace there is some Grace left undecayed with which they are bemoaning their decline! I would not give you encouragement, dear Brothers and Sisters, if you are asleep at all, to continue in it, but yet I would say this, that if you mourn over your sluggishness, you are not altogether a sluggard—if you feel uneasy in your dullness you are not altogether given over to spiritual stupidity—if you are anxious to be awakened out of your slumber, it is certain that you are not given over to sleep yourself into the sepulcher of insensibility.

God be thanked that you cannot enjoy pleasant dreams upon the bed of carelessness! You do not sleep as do others— you are evidently not steeped in that fatal slumber of spiritual death in which the dead world is slumbering all around. Infinite Mercy has had some dealings with you and has made you to be spiritually awake so far that you can feel that you sleep and mournfully confess it. When a man detects pride within him but has Grace enough to long to be humble; when a man feels hardness of heart but groans about it and wishes to be softened; when a man laments the stubbornness of his will and cries to God to give him full submission; when a man mourns a sluggishness of heart and strives after quickening—then he has marks and signs of spiritual life and of an inward energy which will, by God's Grace, cast out his disease and bring him spiritual health!

There is life where there is pain! There is growth where there is a yearning of desire! The holy fire still lingers in the breast, though it is so smothered by the ashes that only a little smoke can be discerned. It will revive again; it will kindle

and burn up, for it is of God's creating. He who can mournfully say, "I sleep," will, one day, be wide awake. Be very thankful, therefore, when you have a tender conscience! Cultivate a quick perception and when you are aware of the slightest defalcation or decline, confess at once to God that you begin to sleep. Further, as this sleep is a matter recognized, so is it a matter complained of. The spouse is not pleased to sleep—she says, "I sleep," but she does not mention it as a matter for congratulation! She is not pleased with her condition.

Here, again, I would remark that it is well for saints, when they perceive that they are in the least degree backsliding, that they should mourn before God and accuse themselves before Him. "Judge yourselves, that you be not judged." Before another person can hint that you are careless, find it out, yourself, and mourn over it. Before another can complain of your dullness and say, as the shipmen did to Jonah, "What do you mean, O sleeper?" complain about yourself. Act tenderly to others, but severely towards yourselves. So all prudent men will do if God keeps them prudent. This sleepiness is not a thing to be indulged in, but to be abhorred. To say the least of it, it is a low state of enjoyment. Sleep is peaceful and quiet, but it cannot enjoy the sweets of the senses and the delights which the mind can receive.

Sleep is Death's cousin and he that slumbers lies at the door of the sepulcher. The image of death is set upon the sleeper's face and it is a miracle and a sort of foretaste of the Resurrection that any man does wake again after he has fallen into a deep slumber. It is not, therefore, good spiritually for us to be asleep, for then we cannot taste the honey of the Word of God, nor enjoy the fragrance of the ordinances, nor see the beauties of Christ—nor will any of the spiritual passions be delighted, nor our spirit be carried away with holy joy. Therefore, when we come into God's House and we hear the old familiar story of the Cross and it does not charm us, let us mournfully say, "I sleep."

When others are ready to dance before the Lord with exultation while singing the solemn Psalm, if we, ourselves, feel no devout gratitude, let us cry self-complainingly, "I perceive that I sleep." And when at the Table the chosen emblems of the bread and wine do not bring the Master near to us and we go away as hungry as we came because we have not fed on His body and His blood, then let us say, again, "Alas, I sleep, I sleep! For these things would be most sweet and nourishing to me if my spiritual faculties were as they ought to be!" If we fail to enjoy the banquets of our Bridegroom's love, it must be because a deadness is stealing over us and we are not so thoroughly alive and awake as we were in days gone by—and this is a condition to be deplored as soon as it is perceived.

We ought to complain of ourselves if we sleep because it is a state of danger. While men slept, the enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat. It is bad, then, to have a drowsy minister and drowsy Church officers, for these will not watch the fields for God. He who sleeps is in danger of the thief or the murderer. While Saul lay stretched on the plain, Abishai lifted up his spear and said, "Let me smite him but this once." He who sleeps may lose his all, yes, lose himself. Let us, therefore, dread this perilous state and, if we feel it creeping over us, let us shake ourselves and say, "I sleep, but I will not give way to slumber! Lord, by Your Grace, awaken me!"

Sleep is a state of inaction. A man cannot do his daily business while his eyes are closed in slumber. There is a sleepwalking which can do much, but I know of no spiritual sleepwalking. You cannot walk the

road to Heaven asleep, nor preach the Gospel as you should, nor serve God and your generation aright if you are in a spiritual slumber. I know a great many who are so—they are alive, I hope, but very sleepy! They do very little; they are too sluggish to attempt much. "The slothful man says, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets." This was his argument for keeping in the chimney corner. In truth, the lion is about as real as the monster which has been described of late as prowling over this county of Surrey and devouring women and children all the way from Banstead Downs to Clapham Common!

Solomon seems to have been very familiar with this fable of the sluggard's lion, for in another proverb he makes the idler cry, "There is a lion outside! I shall be slain in the streets!" These poor creatures are so dreamy in spirit that they see a lion everywhere—threatening them if they try to do good in any form! They must sit quiet and still and try to enjoy themselves as best their sleep will allow them to do, for they cannot venture out to work because of the lion! They cannot teach a little Sunday school class, for there is a lion there! Nor go out to speak to a dozen people in a village—a furious lion is roaring there! In fact, they will be devoured if they leave their easy retirement and put their heads out of doors. God help us to escape this lazy condition! May we live while we live! Let not our souls merely act as salt to keep our carcasses from rotting, but let them be the seed plot and hotbed of holy actions out of which shall yet spring glory to God and blessing to our fellow men. If you do not feel active and energetic, make it a matter of self-complaint and utter the shame-faced confession, "I sleep."

Yet again, this slumber should be not only a matter of complaint as an evil to be dreaded, but it should be regarded as a fault to be ashamed of. A Christian man should not say, "I feel dull, careless and inactive," and make the confession as if he almost deserved to be pitied for a misfortune which was no fault of his. My Brothers and Sisters, you may be pitied, but you are, also, to be blamed, perhaps blamed far more than pitied! An apparent spiritual slumber may creep over us because the body is very weak and sickly and here pity is allowable, yes, justly due. Certain states and conditions of the flesh, no doubt, will overcome the spirit, as when even the choicest of the Apostles slept in the garden. The Master at first said, "What? Could you not watch with Me one hour?" But afterwards He made a generous excuse for them and said, "The spirit is truly willing, but the flesh is weak." Make excuses for others and let your Lord make excuses for you, but do not frame apologies on your own account.

David writes in the Psalm, "I said, This is my infirmity." Quite right, David. I dare say it was so. But the other day I said the same of myself and before long I answered to my conscience for it, for conscience asked, "Is it not your sin as well as your infirmity?" I was compelled to divide the statement, no, at last to withdraw the first part of it altogether and cry, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" May we not be too ready to lay the blame of our impatience, our unbelief, or our hastiness upon the body when we ought to take all blame to ourselves? It is always safest to blame ourselves and it is frequently dangerous to make an excuse. Still, sometimes dullness may be an infirmity. When a man is weary with a hard day's work, or with business that has cost him long care and he kneels by his bedside at a very late hour to pray and finds himself going to sleep, I do not think that his fault is a very grievous one.

It is certainly not that dreadful sin which shall never be forgiven, either in this world or in that which is to come! When a man is brought very low by weakness of body and he cannot, on the Sabbath, feel himself up to the mark in all respects, I do not think we should hold a Church meeting and turn him out! Nor do I think that he should excommunicate himself! When a widowed spirit is broken with bereavement when the husband is dead; when children or brothers have died; when parents have been snatched away and the heart is very heavy—if the heart cannot rejoice in the Lord, it is a pity that it cannot—but there is a measure of infirmity as well as fault in the heaviness of the soul. In such cases good people may

guardedly say with David, "This is my infirmity." May God help us when we feel such infirmities that we may speedily rise above them, being made strong in weakness and being taught to glory in infirmities because the power of Christ rests upon us.

Again, I repeat it—for others we may put in the gentle word even as the Master did for His disciples—"The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak," but for ourselves we should rather use heart-searching and self-condemnation that we may make the bed of slumber thorny to our idle flesh. Brothers and Sisters, when a Christian's soul is heavy with slumber, he ought to be ashamed. Think of who it is that loved us, even Jesus, the eternal Son of God! Has He loved us and can we ever be cold towards Him? Then blush and let the scarlet abide in the face! Think of what Jesus has done for us and what love He has manifested towards us. O Gethsemane! O Calvary! Are we thus redeemed and after this does our love decline into slumber? Break, my Heart! Break with indignation at yourself that such should be the case!

And what is this time in which we live? A time in which all the powers of darkness are on the alert, raging to do evil and mischief. Are we sleeping now, when the adversary is daily making an attack upon us? When men are dying and are perishing by millions, can it be that we slumber? And such as we are, who do little enough when we are wide awake and have little enough of power and ability—how is it that we can slumber? If we are lethargic, should we not bow ourselves in the dust before God and beseech Him to have mercy upon us? Furthermore, it is an evil to be fought against. When a man is obliged to say, "I sleep," let him not content himself with sleeping on. Now is the time for much prayer! Let him wrestle with this deadly foe till he is fully awakened!

Falling into indifference on the road to Heaven is something like sleeping on the vast plains of snow, where, if a man gives way to the natural inclination to slumber which comes on through the intense cold, he may lie down and never rise again! Oh, take care, you that are looking for Heaven and eternal life, that you yield not to sleep, for your Master comes and it may be that within another hour you may hear the midnight cry! Let us whip ourselves with a strong resolve that we will not sleep. Let us say unto our soul, "Come, wake up! My spirit, you shall not sleep. This cannot be. I must not have it, I will not, I dare not. I will goad you, I will crucify you to the cross, for you shall not slay yourself with suicidal slumber."

With this resolve let us seek out means of waking ourselves up. Sometimes we may do well to seek for a better ministry than we have attended. Alas, there are ministries which are as cradles to rock babes to sleep! There are preachers who charm most wisely if their intent is to send the universe to sleep. Beware of preaching which comforts you in idleness and increases

your spiritual insensibility! There are certain preachers who mar the Gospel and tell their tale so heartlessly that I think if all Heaven did rock and reel with tempest, a man might yet sleep on so long as such soothing voices lulled his ears. We cannot afford to waste our Sabbaths in listening to another Gospel, or in hearing lullabies which make us duller than we were.

But if you cannot reach a rousing ministry, read good books—turn to solid Gospel treatises, such as the Puritans bequeathed us. Search the Scriptures and the works of godly men whose words were all on fire—these thrown upon your soul like burning coals may set it on fire. Christian conversation, too, is another useful means of keeping us awake. John Bunyan mentions that in going over the Enchanted Ground the pilgrims, to prevent drowsiness, fell into good discourse. Here is his quaint rhyme about it—

"When saints do sleepy grow, let them come here And hear how these two pilgrims talk together: Yes, let them learn of them in any wise, Thus to keep open their drowsy, slumbering eyes, Saints 'fellowship, if it is

managed well, Keeps them awake and that in spite of Hell.'" Imitate this example, but if discourse does not avail, get to work for Christ! This is a very effective way of keeping yourself awake, God the Holy Spirit blessing you in it. In looking after the souls of others, your own soul will receive a watering.

I do not think that soul-slumber so often visits the active as it does those who have little to do in the Master's service. If active service does not suffice, then cry mightily to God, "I sleep, my Savior! Awake me, I pray You!" You are half awake, already, if you can cry in that fashion. Cry again, "I sleep, my Lord! Use even a rod upon me to wake me rather than I should slumber." You are not asleep, Brother, Sister, you are already awakened—the bitter anguish of the soul in its horror of its own slumber has already been blessed of God to its awakening. Anyway, this sleep is an evil which must be overcome. Come, make up your minds, today, members of this Church, that you will not yield to drowsiness!

I hope none of you are inclined to say, "Well, I may get to Heaven in this sleepy way and so what does it matter? My fellow members would put me in the ambulance and carry me along like a wounded soldier and this will be easier than marching at the double, day after day." No, no, my Brothers and Sisters, we have enough of the invalid and wounded already! We have as many as we can carry of the non-effectives. We need no more. Ask the blessed Physician to make you strong so that you may tug at the guns with the rest of us, or charge the enemy at bayonet point when the trumpet sounds. I said, years ago, I would sooner lead a dozen real live earnest Christians than a dozen hundred of the half-and-half sort and this feeling grows with me!

I would almost as soon not be a Christian as be as some Christians are—they have enough religion to make them uncomfortable, but not enough to make them useful. They drink such shallow draughts that they increase their responsibility rather than their energy. Oh, for a deep draught of Grace which shall fill us with all the fullness of God and make us men in Christ to the utmost capacity of our sanctified manhood! Cold meat may be pleasant, but cold religion is an ill dish to serve to Christ or to ourselves! God make us like those creatures that are said to live in the fire. May He fill us with His own Spirit and make us burn and blaze with an unquenchable heat of love towards Him of whom it is said that the zeal of God's house did eat Him up. He poured out His soul unto death that He might redeem us to Himself—let us see to it that we are altogether His own. With this I leave the sleeping for another theme.

II. We reach the point of the paradox—here is WATCHFULNESS CLAIMED by one who confessed to sleep. "My heart is awake," says the Bride, "I sleep, but my heart is awake." It may seem an odd thing to sleep and yet to be awake, but I commenced by saying that the Christian is a great puzzle. Ralph Erskine's, "Believer's Riddle," is a remarkable production, but every word of it may be justified by experience and by Scripture. A man is a mass of contradictions, but a man in Christ is far more so. He truly says—

I'm in my own and others' eyes

A labyrinth of mysteries." We are asleep and awake at the same time. As Erskine rhymes it—

"Both sleeping flesh I have, that rests

In sloth unto my shame,

And waking Grace, that still protests

Against this lazy frame."

There is an inner life within every Christian which can never die and there is about him an inward death which can never rise to life. Jesus said, "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Therefore this Divine Life, though it may grow weak and feeble and slumbering, yet never passes into the condition of absolute death, or even of complete insensibility. Somewhat of Heaven is about the man of God when the earth encompasses him most. "Sin shall not have dominion over you"—God still has the throne, even when Satan rages most. This inward life usually shows itself in the uneasiness of the declining heart. When a Believer feels that he is not what he ought to be, nor what he wants to be, he cannot be happy. He cannot rest and be content. There was a time when such a condition would have satisfied him, but now he is distressed beyond measure and, like Noah's dove, finds no rest for the sole of his feet. Hear him sing in the minor key—

"Where is the blessedness I knew

When first I saw the Lord?

Where is the soul-refreshing view

Of Jesus and His Word?

What peaceful hours I then enjoyed!

How sweet their memory still!

But they have left an aching void

The world can never fill." He sleeps, but his heart beats, sighs and palpitates with dire unrest!

The inner life shows itself, also, in desire, for the heart is the seat of desire and it leads the man to say, "I am not what I would like to be. I live at a poor dying rate—Christ's love is so great to me and mine to Him so chill. Lord, lift me out of this frozen state. I cannot bear this grave of lethargy. Lord, bring my soul out of prison! Give me more Grace. Give me Grace to love Jesus better and to be more like He is. Poor as I am, I long to be enriched by Your love and mercy. O visit me with Your salvation!" Such a pleading heart is still awake though the mind may be dull. The Lord judges us by our earnest desires more than by our accomplishments.

An old writer says if you send a man on horseback for the doctor, if the horse is a sorry jade that cannot move quickly, you praise the man when you see him whipping and spurring and doing his best to hurry the horse along. You do not blame him for that which is beyond his power. So he says, oftentimes, when our desires whip and spur our languid spirits, God sees what a rate we would go at if we could and He takes the will for the deed. Often our desires are so awakened that we would harness the lightning and bit the tempest if we could and spur both to a swifter speed! Desires prove wakefulness—"I sleep, but my heart is awake."

The spouse gave another proof of her wakefulness by her discernment. She says, "It is the voice of my Beloved that knocks." Even when half asleep she knew her Lord's voice. You may catch a true Believer at his worst, but he still knows the Gospel from everything else and can detect another Gospel in a moment! You shall come forth with all your eloquence, your poetry and sweet concocted phrases—with a something that is not the Gospel of the blessed God and you shall, for a moment, please the ears of the Christian because of the literary excellence of your address. But he soon detects you. It is true of all

Christ's sheep, "A stranger they will not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers."

The awakening Believer perceives that the most musical voice of a stranger has not the charm in it which is found in the voice of His Lord. Yes, he soon closes his ears to it in disgust and in holy trembling lest he should be deceived. His resolve is, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." He determines to be deaf to other voices, but to his Redeemer he says, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears." Blessed is he who in his dullest state can still discern and discriminate and cry, "It is the voice of my Beloved."

This wakefulness of heart shows itself often in the soul chiding itself. "I sleep," she says. She would not have blamed herself as I have tried to describe her doing if she had not been, in some measure, awake. This blessed living wakefulness within the heart will, by-and-by, display itself in action. The heart will wake up all that is within us and we shall hasten to our Beloved. It is wonderful how a true Christian flies back to his God as soon as the Spirit of the Lord sets him free from the net. "Whom have I in Heaven but You and there is none upon earth that I desire besides You." Brothers and Sisters, you and I cannot rest anywhere short of Christ! When we were ravens, we could rest on our own wings, or on the carrion of this world—but now that we have been made doves, we must seek our Noah and His ark!

A friend at the back of this Tabernacle furnished me with some pigeons but a little while ago. They were taken home to Norwood and shut up for a few days and well fed in the hope that they would stay with us. But no sooner were they set at liberty than they soared aloft, made three circles in the sky and then flew direct for this spot. How I wished, on my sick bed, that I had their wings and could hasten here, too! It is so with Believers. The devil may put us in captivity and shut us up awhile, but give us the opportunity and our heart knows the way back to Jesus!

The spouse has dove's eyes and she sees from afar. She makes short work of it and is back, again, with all the speed of the chariots of Amminadib! This puzzle of, "I sleep, but my heart is awake," has been experienced by thousands. I quote no solitary instances—there are hundreds of the same. I lately met with a little poem by Thomas Vaughan which touched my heart because it so aptly described my state. I will read it, to show you that the paradox of a Believer's life is no fiction of mine, but is the frequent experience of God's people. In a little out-of-the way poem, which perhaps no one of you has ever seen, Vaughan quaintly sings—

"My sweetest Jesus! 'Twas Your voice,

'If I am lifted up I'll draw all to the sky,'

Yet I am here! I'm stifled in the clay,

Shut up from You and the fresh feast of day. I know Your hand's not short, but I'm unfit, A foul, unclean thing to take hold of it! I am all dirt! Nor can I hope to please

Unless in mercy You love a disease. Diseases may be cured, but who'll reprieve Him that is dead? Tell me, my God, I live.

'Tis true, I live: but I so sleep that I cannot move, scarcely hear when You call! Sin's lullabies charm me when I would come But draw me after You and I will run.

You know I'm sick: let me not feasted be, But keep a diet, all prescribed by Thee.

Should I carve for myself, I would exceed

To surfeits soon and by self-murder bleed.

I ask for stones and scorpions, but still crest And all for love: should not You grant, I were lost. Dear Lord, deny me still: and never sign My will, but when that will agrees with Yours And when this conflict's past and I appear

To answer, what a patient I was here, How I did weep when You did woo: repine At Your best sweets and in a childish whine Refuse Your proffered love; yet cry and call, For rattles of my own to play withal: Look on Your Cross and let Your blood come in

When mine shall blush as guilty of my sin.

Then shall I live, being rescued in my fall. A text of mercy to Your creatures all

Who having seen the worst of sins in me, Must needs confess, the best of love's in Thee." Does not this writer dip his pen into your soul's sorrows?

III. Spare me a minute or two while I dwell on the head of MYSTERY SOLVED. "I sleep, but my heart is awake." Why is her heart awake? It is because the voice and knock of her Beloved are heard. Every child of God has a wondrous union with Christ. "Because I live," says Christ, "you shall live also." Ask why you are alive in such a body of death and grave of sin as your poor nature is? You live because Christ lives and you cannot die till He does! This is why you cannot sleep as do others, because He does not sleep. "He that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep," and till Christ's spiritual life shall

altogether slumber out into forgetfulness and inaction yours never shall. The mystic union between yourselves and Jesus secures you from destruction which, apart from Him, would sweep you away as with a brook.

This is why, dear Friends, when you get where you should not be, you cannot be happy because Jesus is not happy when you are there! He groans over your follies. They cost Him wounds and bloody sweat and death and they must cost you something, too, if you indulge in them. That field all tangled with the brambles tore the Shepherd when He sought you out and the briars will tear you, also, if you wander there. The reason why you are awake at all is because Jesus calls you. His voice rings in your ears through His Word both heard and read. He more than calls—He knocks at your heart by affliction, by mercy, by warning, by comfort. He will do more with you, yet, if you are His—He will put in His hand by the hole of the door and then you shall open to Him and He will come and sup with you and you with Him.

The mystery is all solved, the saint would be a sinner if it were not that he is one with the sinner's Savior—the living Believer would be a lump of death and corruption if it were not that he is one with Him who is the Resurrection and the Life who has said, "Whoever believes in Me shall never die." And again, "Though he were dead yet shall he live." What a blessing is this vital union with the ever-blessed Head, immortal and unslumbering!

IV. Now for THE LESSON LEARNED. It is this—be very careful when you possess great joys, for in this instance the spouse had been with the Beloved in choice fellowship and yet was soon drowsy. He had given her to drink abundantly and He had feasted with her, but no sooner had the sun set than she said, "I sleep." We are amazing creatures. Our very perfect brethren, although they do not see it, generally exhibit

some glaring imperfection if you let them talk for five minutes. If you knock at the door to see if Mr. Pride is at home, you need not praise him long before he will show his full-length portrait. We are thankful for these brethren so far as they are saints, for good people are scarce—but I wish they would not tell us so much about their saintliness, for I have noticed that great cry often goes with little wool and the noisiest thing that goes down the street is the dust cart.

He who makes most noise about his own perfection has the least of it! Let us be careful whenever we rise to the summit of the hill—careful to stay up, careful that we so act when we are up that we do not come down with a run. Whenever the Lord visits you, entertain Him right heartily. Be careful that nothing grieves Him, lest He depart. High joys may produce slumber—the chosen three upon the Mount Tabor were soon overcome with heaviness. At the too-transporting sight of the transfigured Savior, darkness covered them! Mind what you do when on the mountain! Be careful to carry a full cup with a steady hand.

Next, when you are blaming yourselves for your own work, do not forget the work of the Spirit in you. "I sleep"—smite your heart for that, but do not forget to add, if it is true, "My heart is awake." Bless God for any Grace you have, even if it is but little. What if I am not sanctified as I wish to be and shall be, yet I am perfectly justified! What if I do not exhibit my Father's likeness so completely as I hope to do, yet I am His child! What if, as yet, I do not produce all the fruits of the Spirit, yet I have the germs of them, the buds and blossoms—and soon I shall have the ripe fruit! In Aaron's rod we see that the same power that could put the buds and blossoms on a dry stick could put the almonds there, too!

Lastly, make sure, above all things, that you have that true faith which knows the voice of Jesus. The spouse had not awaked if it had not been for the charm of Jesus' voice which affected even her drowsy faculties. Some persons can be more easily awakened by the voices of those they love than by any other means. The charm of memory, the charm of intimate affection, the charm of delight gives music to some tongues—let your ears find all its music in the voice of Jesus! Know His voice. He says, "Incline your ears and come unto Me: hear and your soul shall live. My sheep hear My voice and I know them and they follow Me and I give them eternal life."

God bless you, dear Friends, with a faith that trusts Jesus, knows His voice and follows Him! And may we be awakened out of all our sleepiness, if we are at all drowsy, into a holy wakefulness so as to serve the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and strength while we live. Come, Holy Spirit and give us this privilege, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/asleep-and-yet-awake-a-riddle/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net