

O Sleeper Arise

by David Legge

The sermon challenges Christians to arise and meet the need of the lost, both locally and globally, by praying for them and taking action to reach them.

Duration: 31:15

Scripture: Jonah 1:6, Matthew 6:33, Luke 6:17

Topics: "Eternal Judgment", "Evangelism Urgency"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by describing the horrifying experience of witnessing a man being shot dead in the street and emphasizes the lasting impact such a sight has on a person. He then urges the audience to imagine the eternal suffering of a lost soul facing the wrath of God in hell. The speaker highlights the urgency of the situation, stating that while people are perishing and hell is filling, many are asleep and unaware of the need to reach out to the lost. He concludes by quoting a historian who describes the early Christians as intensely propagandist and willing to die for their faith, and calls for the church to come down from the mountain of controversy and convention to focus on the mission of Christ.

Transcript

Turn with me if you would to Jonah chapter 1 and our text this morning is verse 6, the verse that we finished on. You're all, I'm sure most of you, familiar with the story of Jonah. It reaches the point where the storm is breaking up the boat and the crew is calling upon their pagan gods to save them and then in verse 6, the shipmaster came to Jonah and said unto him, what meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise and call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us that we perish not.

The thought that is in my mind this morning is does the lost world not have a right to ask the same question of all of us as Christians today? What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us that we perish not. They just wonder would the shipmaster's mud of accusation stick to the Church of Jesus Christ in some quarters today. When we consider for a moment that out of all those who were sailing on this ship, Jonah ought to have been the one who was most awake.

Yet not only was he sleeping, but the Bible says that he was fast asleep. The howling winds, treacherous breakers and screaming sailors didn't arouse him out of his blissful oblivious sleep to their awful reality. Now if we see many things in the prophecy of Jonah, which we do if we were to study the four chapters of this book, one thing that we can clearly see for sure, even only reading the first six verses of the first chapter, is the deadly effects of sin upon the life of the believer.

In fact, there is no anesthetic that can knock you out just like sin. Jonah's sin was disobedience. That was his problem, and we read verse 6 and see that that sin made him numb to the present need of those who were around him.

But it is a question worth pondering whether Jonah ever slept as soundly as when he was on the boat to Tarsus. What I mean by that is it's reasonably easy to stay awake spiritually when you're surrounded by God's people doing all the right things, but it's hard to resist slumbering and the deadening influences of the world around you when you exist in a purely secular realm. I can't say this for Jonah, but I'm sure of it for the Western world today, that wealth is a pillow which has creeded many of us into a spiritual doze.

The materialistic comfort in which most of us live today in the West, the general affluence and lack of personal need in our own home and domestic situations, has turned, I believe, much of the Western Church into a sleeping giant. We are fast asleep when we consider the world's need around us. It's no surprise that when we pamper the flesh, the body will fall asleep.

You cannot be soft on the flesh and expect your spirit to be sharp. And of course, we cannot ignore the fact that it's not just the church's fault or believers' faults, but Satan has his own desire behind all of this, trying to hypnotize the church into the need that there is around in our world. Satan is directing behind the scenes, and he knows that a Christian unconsciously will not thrive if he is asleep to the awful need of the world.

And if he can lull God's watchmen to sleep, he will take the city with ease. The fact of the matter is that the devil cannot send us to hell. We are saved for time and for eternity.

He cannot have that. However, we are as good as dead if he can get us to fall fast asleep concerning the need of those around us. There can come a time when we're so numbed by the standards of the system around us, tempted by the comfort offered to the flesh and tantalized, perhaps, by the gifts that the devil would offer to us, that we find ourselves in a position of likewise being rebuked by the shipmaster of this world, who, although he himself does not know God, knows better than we do the slumber that we have slipped into.

He says to us, What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise and call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us that we perish not. Let me leave three short thoughts with you concerning this verse and the call of the world to all of us in the church, those especially who may be asleep. The first is this.

We are generally asleep to the great need of the lost. We are generally asleep to the great need of the lost. Of course, the story goes that Jonah himself was asleep when all other hands were on deck.

Verse 5. Every man cried unto his God and cast forth into the waves that were in the ship to lighten it to them, but Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship and he lay and was fast asleep. When every man's hands were on deck, Jonah was asleep while every other man was doing his best to lighten the ship. The one who was the very one who could solve the problem was asleep.

I like the church that is at times when we consider those in the world who are unregenerate men, who perhaps have more compassion on the physical needs of the masses than we as believers in Jesus Christ have upon the spiritual needs of the souls that are around us who are lost and starving spiritually and on their way to hell. I thought about it for a moment this week. There are charities, volunteers, government agencies who know nothing about the love of God in Christ, know nothing about the great eternity, a hope

of heaven, the horrors of hell.

They don't even believe that there is an eternal soul living within the breast of a man, yet they would do more for a dying dog than some Christians would for those who are lost. How is it that we are so careless about the souls of men and women? If after this service a young husband came running in through the back door crying, fire, fire, and his house with his wife and child was in it consuming in the flames, would we not all to a man roll up our sleeves, grab anything that would hold water and run to the knee? If a starving family came to your door in real need, would you not give them so much as a sandwich or a glass of water or milk to quench their thirst? You mightn't be able to support them for a lifetime, but you would do what you could at that particular moment. What your hand found to do, you would do it with all your might because you realize the need that there is.

But why is it that many of us do not do this spiritually when we know spiritual realities? We know of the love of God. We know of the great eternity, a hope of heaven and the horrors of hell, yet at times we sit ignorant to it all in our own selfish existence. The people around us are not crying for physical water to quench their thirst.

They may not even know that they need spiritual water, but the fact of the matter is we are the ones who have that water, who have that bread of life, and who do not give it to them. St. Spurgeon said, O could ye once see with your eyes a soul sinking into hell? It were such a spectacle that ye would work night and day and count your life too short and your hours too few for the plucking of brands from the burning. I wonder have you ever seen a drowning man? Have you ever seen a child caught in a house that is burning down? Have you seen a child mowing down on the road? Have you ever seen a man shot dead in the street? And I dare to say if you've seen any of those things, you'll never ever forget them.

O that we could just see for one moment a lost soul, and imagine what it is to stand being exposed to the wrath of Almighty God, to have the sweat of hell break upon your brow, to hear from the lips of eternal love, depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire. O that we could hear their cries just now. Just at this moment in hell, the multitudes that fall into a bottomless pit, would it not awaken us? Would it not waken us out of any slumber that we may be in, whether it is a slumber of disobedience or any particular sin? Men are perishing, children are dying, hell is filling, yet you are sleeping.

I am sleeping. Let's put some figures to it to make it real for all of us if it is not real already. The world population is impossible to equate but yet scholars tell us that it comes to roughly today 6.204 billion people.

And among those 6.204 billion people there are 140,000 missionaries. 64,000 of those missionaries come from the United States. Foreign missions, funds are distributed in this manner, listen carefully, 87% goes for work among those who are already Christian countries, so-called, who have received the gospel, 87%.

12% funds go for work among already evangelized but non-Christian nations and 1% of the funds for missionary relief goes to work among still un-evangelized people, unreached people groups. You can break it down even further to say it's 74% of missionary funds and personnel goes among nominal Christians, Christian countries so-called, 8% among tribal areas, 6% among Muslims, 4% among non-religious stroke atheists, 3% among Buddhists, 2% among Hindus, 2% among Chinese folk religions, and 1% among Jewish people. I ask you, has the Great Commission not been turned on its head? The Lord Jesus as he was leaving his disciples and ascending to heaven in Acts chapter 1 verse 8 said, but ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you and ye shall be witnesses unto me both

in Jerusalem in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the air.

Yet there is only 1% of missionary resources spent on the Jewish people. Staggering isn't it? We could go on and the fact of the matter would show us that the church at large in the West is generally asleep to the great need of those who are lost. The second offshot of that is that we have not yet arisen to meet the need.

The ship master says, what meanest thou O sleeper? Arise! Get up! Get doing! Have we arisen to meet the need not only in the world but in the district that God has placed us? Hudson Taylor the great pioneer missionary to China said these words and I believe he was right. He was home on furlough and he was sharing a new revelation he believed that God had given to his heart concerning the Great Commission. It was simply this, that we should not here at home be seeking God as to whether his will is that we should go, but we should be seeking God as to whether his will is that we should stay.

Because to stay is the exception. Because Christ has told us all to go into all the world and preach the gospel. As one Christian singer put it, Jesus commands us to go but we turn the other way.

Jesus said in Matthew chapter 9 and verse 37, to his disciples the harvest truly is plenteous but the laborers are few. There is so much work to be done, so many souls to be won and the question that the shipmaster of the world asks us is what are we doing? I could only get American statistics of those involved in missions who are senders and there are a lot of people that should be involved in missions who are not, but of those who are involved 98% are senders and 2% go. Seems a little imbalanced doesn't it? We often say we qualify it and have a little loophole and get out clothes for we Christians who are fast asleep and say well you may not be able to go but you can give and you can pray.

Isn't that what we're saying? But the question is why can't you go? What is stopping you going? Some of you are retired, some of you are students and have the opportunity of a year out, some of you are in your middle age and you're wondering what your existence here is all about and I'll tell you no one but no one at the judgment seat of Christ will regret laying down their lives that others should hear the gospel and the world cries in spirit to us arise. I know that all cannot go but I know that there's a lot can go and won't go. You don't have to go to darkness Africa there is a district around us here that really needs the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I was giving out tracks with some of the men on the 1st of July parade a couple of weeks ago. We were standing in an open air just after the track distribution and we watched the parade go by and what an awful spectacle of sin and false religion it was. Hugh Martin one of our oversight turned to me and said you know this is our community, this is our community and I can honestly say out of the majority of those folk I didn't recognize one face because we are not touching them.

I praise those who are involved in open air work, those who are involved very few number in door-to-door work and I do not underestimate what you do and God has blessed it recently and thank you so much for all that effort but for the majority the large number of us we are not touching those who need the gospel we hardly even meet them. We are fast asleep in the bottom of our boats blissfully oblivious to their pain, to their crying, to their torment. What are we going to do for those who will move in in the district around us? What are we doing now? How will we reach them? The Bible clearly teaches as far as I can understand in the New Testament that the work of atonement has already been done at Calvary.

That work has to be finished in the sense of the in-gathering of souls and although the atoning work is done the in-gathering work is not done and it is our job to do it. Christ has provided the way, the salvation, the life but we are to distribute it among the people and it is through us that the Holy Spirit will save men. We are his ordained method to go and preach the gospel.

Preachers, evangelists, teachers, missionaries, Sunday school teachers, door-to-door visitors, children's workers, you could go on and on and on again and again but if the medicine of the gospel is ready and made it must be taken to those who need it and what is wrong if we somehow in some way are unwilling to distribute it among those who are desperate and dying? Now the conclusion of that is very simple. There should be none in any local church doing nothing. How could you possibly do nothing in the light of such need? And there is nothing that will drag the work into the quagmire of inertia as much as hangers-on who drain church energy's resources when there are dying souls around our doors that need Christ and it's time that we woke up every one of us to the great need to hear them cry, awake arise O sleeper, call upon thy God, help us.

I read recently a sermon by T. DeWitt Talmadge who was said to be the American Spurgeon of a couple of centuries ago now. This sermon was on the text Luke chapter 6 verse 17 and it says of Jesus he came down with them and stood in the plain. He was using this as an analogy how we need to come down off our high brow mountains and reach the people where they are on the plain and this is a few of the paragraphs from that sermon that I want you to listen to very carefully.

He says, is there not some way of bringing the church down out of the mountain of controversy and conventionalism and to put it on the plain where Christ stands? The present attitude of things is like this, in a famine-struck district a table has been provided and it is loaded with food enough for all. The odors of the meat fill the air, everything is ready, the platters are full, the chalices are full, the baskets of fruit are full, why not let the people in? The door is open, yes, but there is a cluster of wise men blocking up the door, discussing the contents of the caster standing mid-table. They are shaking their fists at each other.

One says there is too much vinegar in the caster and one says there is too much sweet oil and the other says there is not the proper proportion of red pepper and I say, two hundred years ago, get out of the way and let the hungry people in. But the door is blocked up by controversies and men with whole libraries on their backs, disputing as to what proportion of sweet oil and cayenne pepper should make up the creed. I cry, get out of the way and let the hungry world come in.

Now listen, I'm standing here and I don't have all the answer. People are harder today it would seem than they have ever been, especially in this district. I don't know.

Don't come and ask me how to reach them, what we can do. I don't know what to do but I'm sure that we need to start thinking and after we start thinking we need to start doing. Doing being the imperative because there are souls that are dying.

D.L. Moody was criticized in his day for his altar calls. One man came to him after the meeting and said this is terrible, getting people to raise their hand and so on, it causes false professions. D.L. Moody turned to him and said well sir I prefer the way I do it to the way you don't do it.

Wasn't that a good answer? We can criticize can't we? But what are we doing to rise, to meet the need of those around? One thing we can be doing that's in this text and I don't have any answers really today but what I have is found in this verse. What meanest thou sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God if so be that God

will think upon us that we perish not. We need to sufficiently call upon our God to have mercy on us, those around us.

The tragedy of verse 5 was that every man cried to his own God yet Jonah was the only one who had the true and living God yet he was silent in prayer. There wasn't a prayer uttering the lips of God's prophet. Where are our prayers for the lost? Now listen, I'm not talking about prayers for the six saints who are going to glory.

I'm not talking about even our loved ones who are unsaved that mean so much to us. But what about the millions who are unknown to us in this world, who have never heard the name of Christ, who even if we did know them would be totally and utterly unlovable. What about their souls? I know it's hard to pray for some folk, it's hard to pray for some places, some countries, even our own.

But I just wonder are there any Abrahams left who will intercede for Sodom? Could there have been a more iniquitous city in Genesis 18, Sodom? The stench that was ascending unto God, God was going to come down and see what was going on among them and then judge the place. But there was a man of God on his knees pleading for Sodom. I know he was pleading for the righteous among Sodom but yet he saved Sodom by his intercession.

Jesus also said to his disciples, it is written, my house shall be called the house of prayer, the house of these. I don't know what we can do, I have a few ideas, but I don't know what we can do at times to reach those who are lost in our world. But let's please do one thing, each one of us today make a covenant before God and as a church to get back to prayer.

To arise and call upon our God, arise ourselves and rise to the work. There's no greater work that will send us out and send others out than the work of prayer. Jesus himself said to his disciples, the harvest truly is plenteous, the laborers are few.

Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth laborers into his harvest field. At least let us be asking the Lord, Lord, what can we do? Lead us, show us, guide us. Can we all examine our hearts today and ask ourselves, have we lost something? Whatever that thing may be, one thing I'm sure of in my own heart and others is that we have somewhere along the way lost the consciousness of the need of those who are lost.

We've got so caught up in ourselves that we cannot see the need. Where and how we lost it, I don't know. But I'll tell you one thing, we need to get it back.

If we are going to serve this generation well and indeed survive to the next one, we need to hear the cry of those who are lost. Arise, call upon thy God. I'm going to finish by quoting a historian who was an historian of the early church and he wrote expressing the common opinion of the Roman pagans concerning the followers of Jesus.

Now this is in the early church. Listen very carefully to their description of the situation that they saw among those who were newly saved in an environment of persecution and martyrdom. He writes, they were intensely propagandist.

While ever unseen they were at work, every member was a missionary of the sect and lived mainly to propagate a doctrine for which they were ever ready to die. Thus the infection spread by a thousand unsuspected channels like a contagion propagated in the air, it could penetrate as it seemed anywhere

and everywhere. The meek and gentle slave that tends your children or attends you at table may be a Christian.

The favorite daughter of your house who has endeared herself to you by a tenderness and grace peculiar her own and which seems to you as strange as it is captivating turns out to be a Christian. The captain of the guards, the legislator in the Senate House may be a Christian. And here he asks this question, in these circumstances who or what is safe? What power can defend the laws and majesty of Rome and the peace of domestic life against an enemy like this? A propagandist church, a church is like an infection in its district and community in such an imperial city as Rome.

A gospel that even though the people had died for their lives was like a contagion propagating the air that was penetrating and smitting all those around in the households even right up to the very palace of the Caesar. And he asks rightly in these circumstances who is safe? Who is safe from the gospel today? It seems nearly everybody. What power can defend the laws and majesty of Rome and the peace of domestic life against an enemy like this? Oh that we had such a bad reputation in our world today.

But our reputation perhaps is bad because the world can justifiably say to us, what meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not. Let us bow our heads. Our Father in heaven forgive us.

Forgive us for not hearing the need, for not feeling the pain, for being so caught up with ourselves that at times we are totally oblivious. Even, God forgive us, even pride looking down upon those who are not like us. But yet Father they need Christ.

There may even be one in this place who needs Christ. Father help us to do more to reach them and we pray for guidance to know what to do in this age where people at times seem so unreachable but yet perhaps the unreachableness is because of our unwillingness to reach out and touch them. Lord we pray for every head bowed.

Maybe you're calling someone to the mission field. Maybe you're calling someone out of inertia, out of a rut. Maybe you're rekindling a flame in their heart that had gone out weeks, months, years ago.

Lord we pray that none of us would be like that crowd of old men standing at the door preventing folk coming in to get the beautiful dish of the gospel that is prepared for all. Lord if there are things in our heart, on our minds, that have made us intransigent, that have brought us into the realm of disobedience and sin, Lord let us not be like Jonah. Oh our Father help us, melt us, mold us, make us after your will and give us a burden and help us oh God to awake out of any sleep that we may be in to arise, arise ourselves and first and foremost to call upon our God that no more should perish because of our inertia.

Hear us we pray in Jesus name.

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