

Sinners in Zion Described and Doomed.

by Edward Payson

The sermon describes three classes of people who are at ease in Zion, and warns against the dangers of the third class who believe they will escape punishment.

Scripture: Isaiah 32:9, Jeremiah 6:14, Matthew 7:21, James 2:19, 2 Peter 2:20

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "True Repentance"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the importance of not being at ease in Zion, emphasizing that true Christians are engaged in a spiritual warfare, constantly seeking to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. He describes different classes of individuals who are at ease in Zion, including infidels, those who deny their sinfulness, and those who falsely believe they are already pious. Payson warns that those who are at ease in Zion are in great danger, as their false peace indicates a lack of true repentance and a disregard for the seriousness of their sins.

Transcript

The inspired writers, my friends, do not scatter either blessings or curses arbitrarily and indiscriminately without informing us on whom they will fall. They never pronounce a blessing, without specifying the character to whom it belongs. And they never denounce a curse or a woe, without describing some class of sinners against whom it is directed. Thus they rightly divide the word of truth, and give every one his proper portion. An instance of this we have in our text, where God by the mouth of his prophet, denounces a woe or curse against such as are at ease in Zion.

My hearers, all who believe that the threatenings of Jehovah are not vain words, will allow that it is highly important for all to know the import of this woe, and whether it is directed against ourselves. That we may obtain this knowledge let us consider the characters here mentioned, and the woe which is denounced against them. I. The persons here mentioned are described, as being at ease in Zion. Zion, you are sensible, was the name of an eminence on which the Jewish temple formerly stood.

Hence the temple was called Zion; and to go up to Mount Zion, was to go up to the temple for the professed purpose of worshipping Jehovah. From the place of worship, the name was gradually extended to the worshippers, so that in process of time the word Zion embraced all who professed to know and worship God, or in other words, the whole Jewish nation; the only nation at that time in the world, by which the true God was worshipped or known. To be in Zion then, taking the word in its largest sense, means to be in a land where the true God is known and worshipped; where religious privileges, similar to those of

the Jews, are enjoyed; a land of gospel light and liberty, where Christ, of whom the temple on Mount Zion was a type, is publicly preached, as the only way of access to God.

Taking the word in a more limited sense, to be in Zion is to have a seat in the house of God, and to be among those who stately meet for the professed purpose of religious worship. If we confine the meaning of the term within still narrower limits, it will include only those who have made a public profession of religion. In this sense the word Zion is often used; but from the context it appears that, in this passage, the word is used in its most extensive signification, embracing all who are members of a nation or community by which the true God is professedly known or worshipped.

Of course, my hearers, it applies to ourselves; for in this sense we are all in Zion. We live in a land of gospel light and liberty; we enjoy religious privileges similar to those of the Jews; and we assemble at stated seasons in the house of God ostensibly and professedly with a view to worship him. Since then we are all in Zion, let us in the next place, inquire whether we are at ease in Zion. You will readily perceive that the ease here intended is ease, not of body, but of mind; ease relating not to our temporal but our religious or spiritual concerns.

Our bodies may be filled with pain, and our minds harassed with continual afflictions, disappointments, and anxieties, so as to be strangers to peace, and yet we may be perfectly at ease in the sense of our text. Speaking in general terms, persons are at ease in this sense; when they feel neither sorrow nor alarm on account of their sins; when they are seldom troubled by the admonitions of conscience; when they are unconcerned respecting their future destiny; in a word, when they are not engaged in working out their salvation with fear and trembling, but feel safe, quiet and secure.

This unconcern respecting themselves is usually accompanied by at least equal unconcern respecting the salvation of others. Agreeably we are informed in the context, that the persons here described are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph; that is, for the evils and calamities that affect the church. They are far from being able to say with the psalmist, I beheld the transgressors and was grieved; rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men keep not God's law. They never weep over, or pray for, a world lying in wickedness, but view with frigid indifference the prevalence of sin; and manifest no zeal to promote the religious interests of mankind.

From this general description of those who are at ease in Zion, it must be evident to the most superficial observer, that they compose a very numerous body. This body may be divided into several classes, corresponding with the various causes to which their ease is to be ascribed. These causes it is necessary to notice. Since it is impossible for a rational being to be perfectly at ease and unconcerned, while he perceives that he is exposed to endless punishment on account of his sins, it is evident that all who are at ease in Zion, must feel persuaded, either that the punishment with which sinners are threatened will never be inflicted; or that they are not themselves sinners; or that, though sinners, they shall in some way or other escape the punishment which their sins deserve.

These three classes include all who are at ease in Zion. The first class deny that any punishment will be inflicted on sinners. The second class allow that sinners will be punished, but deny, or at least, do not perceive that they are sinners. The third class acknowledge that they are sinners, and that sinners will be punished; but still flatter themselves that they shall escape punishment. Let us consider each of these classes in order. 1. The first class includes infidels of every description.

Such were those who denied the immortality of the soul, and said, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Such were those who denied God's government of the world, saying, The Lord seeth not, the Lord hath forsaken the earth; he will not do good, neither will he do evil. Such were those of whom the psalmist speaks who contemned God, and encouraged themselves by saying, He will never requite it; and whose conduct led him to conclude that there was no fear of God before their eyes.

Such also were the scoffers, mentioned by St. Peter, who walked after their vain lusts, and asked, 'Where is the promise of his coming!' Such characters, there is reason to fear, are to be found at the present day; but it will probably be impossible to disturb their false peace by arguments drawn from a book whose contents they disbelieve. They must be left, unless other means prevent, to enjoy their fatal ease till the day, in which, like the devils, they will believe and tremble.

In this first class may also be placed those who believe that all men will be saved; for they deny that the punishment threatened in the Bible will be inflicted on any. Such were those false prophets who cried Peace, peace, when there was no peace, and of whom God said, I have seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem; for they walk in lies, and strengthen the hands of evil doers, so that none of them doth return from his wickedness. They say still unto them that despise me, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you.

'With lies they make sad the heart of the righteous whom I have not made sad, and strengthen the hands of the wicked that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life. Therefore, thus saith the Lord of Hosts concerning the prophets, Hearken not unto their words, for they make you vain; they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord, and behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall; for from the false prophets is profaneness gone out into all the land.

Such too were the disciples of these prophets who when they heard the curse of the law blessed themselves in their hearts, and said, We shall have peace, though we walk in the imagination of our hearts, to add one sin to another; and of whom God said, The Lord will not spare them, but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against them, and all the curses that are written in this book shall be upon them; and the Lord shall blot out their name from under heaven. My friends, if any man, after hearing these passages, can find ease in believing the doctrine of universal salvation, I envy him not the enjoyment of that ease. 2.

Let us proceed, in the next place, to the second class mentioned above; the class composed of those who allow that sinners will be punished, but who deny, or, to speak more properly do not appear to believe that they are sinners. They will allow indeed, in words, that they have committed some sins, though even this they do not seem to feel; but they utterly deny that they are such sinners as the Bible describes; and flatter themselves that their sins are far too few and too small to require an infinite atonement, or to merit everlasting punishment.

They find, or fancy that they find none better than themselves, few so good, and very many worse. Hence they conclude that they are in no danger, that they have nothing to fear, and of course feel easy and secure. Such were the generation mentioned by Solomon who were pure in their own eyes, but who had never been cleansed from their filthiness. Such too was St. Paul before his conversion. I was alive, says he, without the law once but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.

Now to the persons of whom we are speaking, the commandment never came. They are without the law. They know nothing of its spirituality, strictness, and extent; and since by the law is the knowledge of sin, they being without the law, know nothing of their sins. They never tried themselves by this rule. They never considered that he who does not love God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself, tramples at once upon the law and the prophets, and violates in effect every precept of both.

And as they never tried themselves by the law of God, it is evident they cannot feel condemned by this law; and since neither human laws nor human maxims condemn them, they feel free from condemnation, and fear no condemnatory sentence, when tried at the bar of God. We endeavored to show you, a few Sabbaths since, how exceedingly difficult it is to understand our errors. Now these persons do not understand their errors. They have never been convinced of sin, of righteousness and of judgment; or have never been awakened, have never complied with the apostolic exhortation, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee life.

They are, therefore, like a man buried in sleep, totally unconscious of their true character and situation, insensible of their sins, and of the danger to which their sins expose them. Their slumbering consciences were never thoroughly awakened to perform their office. In the language of scripture, they have eyes, but they see not; ears have they, but they hear not; for the spirit of deep slumber is fallen upon them. So deep indeed, so profound are their slumbers, or rather their lethargy, that they are said to be dead in trespasses and sins; and hence like the lifeless tenants of the tomb, they perceive not that they are dead.

Hence they never felt that they are exposed to the wrath to come; and, of course, have never fled from it, never asked with anxiety, or even with seriousness, What shall we do to be saved? What may appear still more strange, though they profess to hope for heaven, they seem to regard it with indifference. At least their hopes do not appear to wean them from the world, or to support them under the evils of life, or to afford them any solid consolation, or even to excite any gratitude; nor do they manifest any desire to anticipate the happiness of heaven by engaging in its employments while here below.

In short, every religious feeling is dead or asleep in their breasts; and to every religious object they are insensible. At morning, at noon, and at night, religion may knock at the door of their hearts, but there is no voice, nor any that regardeth. All within is silent, and cold, and still, as a sepulchre. They are at ease in Zion, asleep in the house of God, dreaming of worldly objects and pleasures, to which they are all awake and alive, and in the pursuit of which, all their powers are engaged.

In this class too may be included those who have at some period of life been the subjects of serious impressions, but have either stifled those impressions by a violent resistance--dismissed them with excuses, or suffered them to be effaced by negligence. Such persons have not always been at ease in Zion. Their false peace has been disturbed, their consciences have been awakened, and they have trembled at her voice and smarted under her scourge. But in some one of the ways mentioned above, her voice has been silenced, or she has been lulled to sleep by opiates; and now these wretched self-destroyers slumber even more quietly and profoundly than before, except when the unwelcome light of truth or the disagreeable voice of reproof disturbs them by exciting mingled emotions of anger, contempt and fear.

Such persons the apostle compares to trees, twice dead, plucked up by the roots. Their consciences are seared as with a hot iron; and because they receive not the truth in the love of it, that they may be saved, God often sends them strong delusions, so that they believe a lie. Hence they usually remain not long in

this class, but after various changes seek refuge and ease in universalism or infidelity. 3. Our attention is next called to the third class mentioned above. This class seem to be less distant from the truth than either of the others.

They acknowledge that they are sinners, and that sinners will be punished; and yet they are at ease, for they contrive in various ways to persuade themselves that though other sinners will be punished, they shall themselves escape. In places where the gospel is clearly and faithfully preached, this class is usually much more numerous than either of the former, and includes a greater variety of characters. In the first place, it includes all who maintain their false peace by promises of future repentance and reformation, and by hopes founded on these promises, that they shall secure salvation before death arrives.

Such persons, though habitually, are not always at ease. Their avowed belief that they are sinners, and that sinners will be punished, renders it impossible for them to be perfectly free at all times from anxiety and alarm. The attacks of disease, or the sudden death of an acquaintance, or a pungent sermon, will often disturb them for a moment; but they soon recover their peace of mind by making fresh promises and resolutions to become religious at some future period. On the fulfillment of these promises and resolutions they rely with the fullest confidence.

They seem not to entertain the smallest doubt that they shall become truly pious before the close of life. At the worst, they shall repent on their dying bed; for these persons almost ever expect to die of some lingering disease, which will afford them full opportunity to fulfil their resolutions and make their peace with God. The possibility that death may surprise them suddenly and unexpectedly, or that God, provoked by their delays, may give them up, is entirely overlooked; and they rely with as much confidence on their anticipated goodness, as if they were actually possessed of it; so that perhaps the most established Christian does not feel more sure of salvation.

Agreeably, they are represented in the context as putting far away the evil day. At the head of the class stands Felix. When he heard Paul reasoning of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, he trembled. His delusive ease was for the moment disturbed, but he soon restored it, by saying, Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee. My hearers, if all the fair promises and good resolutions which have since been made, with reference to a future convenient season, had been executed, the situation and appearance of mankind would be widely different from what they are; joy would have been much more frequently felt in heaven over repenting sinners, and the celestial city would have been thronged by millions who will never enter its gates.

But alas, this convenient season very seldom arrives; and, of course, the resolutions which depend for fulfillment upon its arrival, are seldom performed. They serve only to defraud those who make them of their opportunities, and of salvation, and to maintain a delusive fatal ease, which could be maintained by those persons in no other way, and which, if not destroyed, inevitably destroys all who indulge in it. The greater part of those who recur to this method of maintaining it, are to be found among the young, especially among those of them, who have received a religious education, or who have enjoyed from their childhood the clear light of the gospel.

Such persons are usually not sufficiently hardened in unbelief to make light of God's threatenings; nor are their consciences so far seared as to render them insensible of their sins; nor can they at once reject the truths which they have been taught, and seek refuge in infidelity. They have therefore no way to render themselves easy in their sins, except that which has now been described; making good resolutions; and

their youth, their health, and their expectation of long life, encourage them to adopt this method by promising them many future opportunities or convenient seasons for the performance of these resolutions.

There is perhaps no class of sinners whose situation is more dangerous; certainly no one which occasions more anxiety amid uneasiness to the faithful ministers of Jesus Christ, than this. It is impossible to know what course to pursue with them. To wait for the fulfillment of their resolutions, is like pursuing the termination of a rainbow, which still recedes as you advance. They assent to every timing, but they really yield to nothing. Tell them that they are sinners, they confess it; that they are objects of God's displeasure, they acknowledge it; that they are exposed to the wrath to come, they allow it; that they ought immediately to repent and secure salvation, they are sensible that this is their duty.

But he, who therefore, expects to see them do this, will find himself most wretchedly disappointed. Visit them to-morrow, and you will find them just where they were before, just as far as ever from the kingdom of heaven; and all your efforts to rouse them must be again repeated, and again prove unavailing. Yet these very persons often look with contempt or indignation upon infidels and heretics, though they are far more inconsistent than either. They seem to fancy that there is some merit in holding and assenting to the truth, though they hold it in unrighteousness; nay more, even though they wrest it to their own destruction; for this many of them do.

They justify their delays by pretending that they can do nothing, and by pleading that they must wait God's time; that when he shall see fit to convert them, they are willing to be converted; thus wholly casting the blame of their sins upon Jehovah, and condemning the Almighty that they may justify themselves. In the second place, this class includes all who entertain a false and groundless persuasion that they have already become pious, obtained the pardon of their sins, and secured the favor of God.

The reasons why persons feel such a persuasion are various. Some feel it because they are more sober, more moral, and more attentive to the externals of religion, than they were; others, because they have made a public profession of religion, and united themselves to the visible church of Christ; a third class, because their religious sentiments are correct and orthodox; and a fourth, because they fancy that they have experienced that great moral change, which the inspired writers call regeneration.

Their consciences have, perhaps, been awakened, their understandings enlightened, their fears alarmed, and their feelings strongly excited. They have been in some measure convinced of their sins, and fancy that they have truly repented, believed in the Savior, and obtained pardon, when in fact, this is not the case. Many such instances are mentioned in the Scriptures, and daily observation proves that they are still to be found. But in whichever of these ways, or for which of these reasons soever, persons falsely persuade themselves that they are pious, the effects are the same; they immediately appropriate to themselves all the precious promises which are made to the pious; call God their Father, Christ their Savior, and heaven their portion; and leave to others the warnings and threatenings.

Of course they feel perfectly secure. They flatter themselves that their souls are safe, that their salvation is secured; and now they have little or nothing to do, but reap the reward of their labors, and pursue their secular concerns without interruption or restraint. Thus, my hearers, have we noticed particularly the several classes, which together compose the great body of those who are at ease in Zion. How little reason they have to be thus at ease, will appear, if we consider, as was proposed, II.

The wo, which is denounced against them in our text. Wo to them that are at ease in Zion! The expression is remarkable. There is no particular curse or threatening denounced against them; but the doom is

expressed in general terms; in terms, which may include curses and threatenings of every kind; and which are therefore the more terrible. Wo to them; that is, let curses be upon them, let misery pursue them. In the context, however, their doom is more particularly described.

It is there declared that the punishment, which they did not fear, shall fall first upon them. But why, it may be asked, is this doom denounced on such characters? Why are they thought worthy of a punishment so severe? I answer, 1. Because the ease which they feel proves that they belong to the number of the wicked. If there is any truth in the Scriptures, it is certain that all who are habitually at ease in Zion know nothing of true religion. They are either careless sinners, or self-deluded hypocrites.

The pious man, the true Christian, is described by the inspired writers, as one who mourns for sin, who is engaged in a spiritual warfare, who is fighting the good fight of faith, who crucifies the flesh with its affections and lusts, who is running the Christian race, who is engaged in subduing and mortifying his sinful propensities, who denies himself, takes up his cross daily, and follows Christ, who, as a pilgrim, a stranger, a traveler, is seeking another and better country, who works out his salvation with fear and trembling.

Now is it possible, that a man, who is doing all this can be at ease in the sense of our text? A soldier in the field of battle at ease! a man running a race at ease! a traveler, toiling up a steep ascent, bearing the cross, at ease! a man crucifying sinful propensities, dear as a right hand or right eye, at ease! a man working out his salvation with fear and trembling, at ease! a man who hates and mourns for sin, loves God, and feels concerned for his perishing fellow creatures, at ease in a world lying in wickedness, where God is dishonored, where Christ is neglected, where immortal souls are perishing by millions; where there is so much to be done, so much to be suffered, so much to be guarded against, and resisted; where death stands at the door ready every moment to summon him to his great account!

My friends, it is impossible. No Christian can be habitually easy, careless, and indolent in such a situation as this? He may, perhaps, slumber for a moment, but even then he is not at ease. Agreeably, our Savior represents the enjoyment of this false peace, as the characteristic of one, who is completely subjugated, enslaved, and blinded by sin. When the strong man armed, says he, keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace; that is, when sin and Satan keep the heart, and fortify it against God; when the eyes of the mind are so blinded, that they see no danger; when the voice of conscience is stifled, so that it does not warn us of danger; when the heart is so hard, that it does not tremble at God's word; then the soul is at peace, then it is at ease in Zion.

But does the Christian, it may perhaps be asked, enjoy no peace? Are we not told of a peace of God which passes all understanding? Does not Christ promise rest to his followers; and are we not told that they who believe have entered into rest? I answer, yes; the Christian does enjoy peace, but it is a peace as widely different from the careless, indolent ease, which we have been describing, as is the rest of a healthy man, from the lethargic slumber of the apoplectic, or the stupefaction of the drunkard.

The rest which Christ promises is promised to those who take upon them his yoke, and learn of him. And does he inculcate indolence, or carelessness? Was he ever at ease in this world? Was it not his meat and drink, his employment, and his recreation, his labor and his rest, to do his Father's will and finish his work? Did he not teach his disciples both by precept and example, to work while the day lasts, to be up and doing, waiting for his coming, and watching unto prayer? So the peace which passes all understanding, is promised to them only who, in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make known

their requests unto God.

And we read when the churches of Christ enjoyed rest, they walked in the fear of God. The man then, who is habitually at ease in Zion, is not, cannot be a Christian; he has not one feature of Christ's image, one mark of the Christian character. And if he is not a Christian, he is an impenitent sinner; if he is not righteous he is wicked; for in the sight of God there are but two classes of character among men; and if he is one of the wicked, then wo unto him; for God directs all his messengers to say, Wo to the wicked, it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him.

Again, Wo to them that are at ease in Zion! for they are not only sinners, but sinners of no common stamp, sinners whose guilt and sinfulness are peculiarly aggravated, and whose punishment will therefore be peculiarly severe. This will be evident if we reflect a moment on their situation and on the privileges which they abuse, on the motives which they resist, on the obligations which they violate. They are in Zion; and in Zion God is known, in Zion, is his earthly dwelling place, in Zion, he makes the clearest manifestations of himself which have ever been made to mortals; in Zion the thunders of his law are heard; in Zion the gracious invitations of the gospel are proclaimed; in Zion, Christ is set forth evidently crucified as a propitiation for sin; in Zion, life and immortality are brought to light; in Zion, the Sun of righteousness shines; on Zion, the rain of righteousness is poured out; in a word, Zion is God's vineyard, in which his servants are commanded to labor; the field of battle, in which the Captain of our salvation summons his soldiers to combat; and in which crowns, thrones, and kingdoms, immortal as their Giver, are held up to view as the reward of victory.

Here then is every motive to exertion, which can be presented to rational beings; motives addressed to every power and faculty of our natures, to our understandings and to our consciences; to our wills and our affections; to our hopes and to our fears, to our love and to our gratitude; to our desires of happiness, and to our aversion to misery. These motives too are presented to us and urged upon us by God himself, by our Creator, our Father, our Preserver, our Benefactor, our Sovereign and our Judge; by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He then who is at ease in Zion, must be deaf to God's voice, he must be blind to God's glories; he must be insensible to every spiritual object; he must be regardless of his immortal soul, and unconcerned for the salvation of others; he must sin against light and against love; he is a servant who knows his Lord's will and does it not, and shall therefore be beaten with many stripes. He is a sentinel who slumbers on his post. He then who can be indolent in Zion, would be indolent in heaven; and fall asleep while the glories of Jehovah blazed around him, and the countless myriads of the redeemed celebrated those glories with eternal songs.

If the heathen are without excuse, as an apostle declares them to be, though they have nothing but the light of nature; how awfully inexcusable, must those be who are at ease in Zion! Once more, Wo to them that are at ease in Zion! because there is little reason to hope that they will ever repent. With respect to those whose false peace is disturbed, who are awakened, alarmed, convinced of sin, and inquiring for a Savior, there is some ground to hope. But on what grounds can we hope for the salvation of them that are at ease; at ease in Zion, who scarcely realize that they have a soul; who either feel not that they need salvation, or fancy that it is already secured?

If they cannot be roused, if their false peace cannot be disturbed, they must inevitably perish; and, humanly speaking, to rouse them seems impossible. Indeed, what can rouse those who sleep in Zion,

where every thing calls to activity? The thunders of Sinai have roared around them; the trumpet of the gospel has loudly sounded in their ears; Christ has called, saying, Go, work to-day in my vineyard; a voice from heaven has exclaimed, Whosoever hath ears to hear, let him hear; ministers have cried, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; death has repeatedly come near and snatched away one and another of their acquaintance into darkness; yet still they are at ease.

What then can rouse them? It is true, God can do it; for with him nothing is impossible. But have we any reason to hope that he will? We may indeed hope, but our hopes must be faint; for he has denounced many most awful threatenings against such characters; he threatens to give them up to their own hearts' lusts, to pour on them a spirit of slumber and of deep sleep; and it does not seem probable that he who denounces such threatenings, he who says, Wo to them that are at ease in Zion, will come to rouse them, till their false peace, and vain confidence shall be forever destroyed by the terrors of the last day.

Then, we are told, sinners in Zion shall be afraid, and fearfulness will surprise the hypocrites in heart. Then they will begin to cry to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. Then the foolish virgins, the false and slumbering professors of Christianity, will awake, and cry in despair, Our lamps are gone out. But however desperate the situation of such may appear, it is the duty of Christ's ministers to despair of none, so long as life remains. I must, therefore, improve the subject, by making one more attempt to rouse those among us, who are at ease in Zion.

In making this attempt, I do not draw the bow at a venture. I do not speak feeling uncertain whether any of the characters whom I address are present. No, it is but too plain, that many, very many of you are at ease in Zion. Some such may be found probably in almost every pew. This house has become, with respect to many, like a great dormitory, where immortal souls are slumbering away their day of grace, and dreaming of peace, when there is no peace. From how few among you is the cry heard, What must I do to be saved!

How few are seen flying from the wrath to come. How many lukewarm professors does the eye of Christ discover, who, though they have a name to live, are in reality dead. How few are the mourners in Zion. How few can say, Rivers of tears run down mine eyes, because men keep not God's law. How many of you never wept one hour in secret over your sins, or lost one hour's sleep in consequence of anxious concern for your salvation. Even whole families may yet be found among us, from which no prayer, no cry for mercy ascends to heaven.

These, my friends, are awful symptoms. They indicate but too plainly a dreadful prevalence of spiritual insensibility among us. Like the inhabitants of the old world, you are eating and drinking, and planting and building, and marrying and giving in marriage, while death, like the flood, is constantly approaching and threatening to sweep you away with resistless violence to the judgment seat. God hearkens and hears, but you speak not aright. Almost no one repents of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?

This insensibility must be removed, this fatal peace destroyed. In God's name, then, I must sound an alarm. In his name, and as his watchman,--who must answer for your souls, if they perish through my neglect,--I set the war-trumpet of Jehovah to my lips, and cry, Wo, wo, wo, to you that are at ease in Zion! Thus saith Jehovah, the great, the mighty, the terrible God, tremble ye that are at ease; rise up and be troubled, ye careless ones, and listen to my voice; for while ye say peace and safety, sudden destruction cometh upon you, and ye shall not escape.

Your peace is delusive; your ease is full of danger; it is the stagnant calm which precedes the hurricane and the earthquake; it is the ease which the diseased patient feels when raging inflammation terminates in

gangrene; the symptom, the immediate forerunner of death. No farther evidence of your guilt and danger is requisite; nothing more is necessary to secure your condemnation, than the very ease which you feel, and the false confidence which confirms it. It is your not fearing the wo, which brings the wo upon you.

It is your very insensibility to your danger, which proves your danger to be great; it is your unconcern for your sins, which proves that they have never been pardoned. I ask not, then, whether you are guilty of great and notorious offences; I ask not, whether you are unbelievers, or impenitent, or apostates; I only ask, whether you are at ease in Zion? If you are, I, and yet not I, but Jehovah says, Wo, wo unto you! Nor is it every degree of concern, every slight momentary disturbance, every serious thought or check of conscience, which will prove that you are not exposed to this wo.

No, it is your habitual feelings and state of mind, which decides your character; and if you are habitually at ease; if you are not working out your salvation, the wo still lies upon you. And remember, the longer it remains upon you, the more heavy and terrible does it become; for he who is not led to repentance by a consideration of the goodness and long-suffering of God, is treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. Remember too, that the longer your false peace continues, so much the more improbable it is, that it will be effectually disturbed, till it is forever too late; for with respect to those who have long been at ease in Zion, God's commission to his ministers is, Go and say to this people, hear ye indeed, but understand not, and see ye indeed, but perceive not.

Make the heart of this people gross, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they should hear with their ears, and see with their eyes, and understand with their hearts, and be converted, and I should heal them. The Lord called to weeping, and mourning, and girding with sackcloth, and behold joy and gladness, eating flesh and drinking wine, and it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of Hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord of Hosts.

And what will the end of these things be? Because I have called and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded; but ye set at nought my counsel and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity and mock when your fear cometh. My careless hearers, your ease must be disturbed, and come to an end. Yes, O yes; your fear will come as desolation, your destruction will come as a whirlwind; distress and anguish will come upon you; for the day of the Lord shall so come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens being on fire, shall be dissolved and pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; and the earth with the works thereof shall be burnt up; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

And he is not man, that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. O, then, since your peace must be finally disturbed, is it not better, that it should be disturbed now, when true peace with God may be obtained, rather than hereafter, when it will avail nothing? Will you still cherish a serpent which is stinging you to the heart? Will you remain at ease, while your sins are unpardoned, while your souls lie in ruin, while God is daily angry, while the wrath to come is rushing on!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/edward-payson/sinners-in-zion-described-and-doomed/>

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