

The Sleeper Awakened.

by Edward Payson

The sermon warns unconverted sinners that they are asleep and unaware of their danger, and urges them to wake up and call upon God to avoid eternal destruction.

Scripture: Psalm 7:11, Proverbs 6:9, Jonah 1:6, Matthew 25:13, Mark 13:35, Luke 21:34, Romans 13:11, Ephesians 5:14, 1 Thessalonians 5:6, 1 Peter 5:8

Topics: "Divine Wrath", "Spiritual Awakening"

Description

Edward Payson preaches on the story of Jonah, highlighting Jonah's reluctance to fulfill God's commission to go to Nineveh and the consequences of his disobedience. He draws parallels between Jonah's spiritual slumber and the unregenerate state of sinners, emphasizing the imminent danger of divine wrath and the need for awakening to call upon God for mercy. Payson urges unawakened sinners to recognize their perilous situation and to seek God before it's too late, while also reminding awakened believers to remain vigilant and fervent in prayer for the lost.

Transcript

"What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God; if so he God will think upon us, that we perish not."

Jonah 1:6

the preceding verses of this chapter, we are informed, that God gave a commission to the prophet Jonah, to go unto Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and denounce heavy judgments against its inhabitants, on account of the sins, of which they were guilty. Important and honorable, however, as such a commission from the King of kings ought to have appeared in the eyes of Jonah, he was, for some reason or other, unwilling to undertake it. This unwillingness probably arose, either from a dread of the labors and fatigues which would attend the performance of his duty; from a reluctance to see the heathen enjoying those prophetic warnings and instructions, which had hitherto been exclusively confined to the Jews; or from an apprehension that the Ninevites would repent, and be received into favor; and thus he would not only be considered as a false prophet in foretelling their destruction, but the obstinate impenitency of his own countrymen in disregarding the multiplied warnings of their prophets, would be rendered more odious and inexcusable, by the ready submission and reformation of that idolatrous city.

For these, or some other similar reasons, he resolved not to go to Nineveh, and supposing, in common with the rest of his countrymen, that the spirit of prophecy was confined to the land of Israel, he hoped to escape from its spring influences, by flying into a foreign country. But, like all who endeavor to frustrate the designs, evade the commands, or flee from the presence of God, he found his hopes miserably disappointed. He, who maketh the winds his messengers; sent a storm to arrest the fugitive prophet, and bring him back to the path of duty.

A mighty tempest arose from the sea, which entirely baffled the seamen's art, and threatened them with immediate shipwreck and death. But while the terrified mariners lightened the ship, and cried every man to his God for deliverance, Jonah, the cause of their distress, lay buried in sleep, ignorant of his danger, and insensible to the storm which soared around him. From this state of slothful security, he was roused to a sense of the horrors of his situation, by the pungent, alarming expostulation in our text: What meanest thou, O sleeper?

Arise and call upon thy God. My friends, this address of the shipmaster to the slumbering prophet, is equally applicable to all those of you who are yet in your natural, unregenerate state; for your situation is far more dreadful and alarming than his. Like him you are exposed to the storm of divine wrath, which every moment pursues and threatens to overwhelm you; like him you are asleep and insensible of your danger. To illustrate the resemblance between your situation and his in these two particulars, and to urge you without delay to rouse from your slumbers and call upon God, that you perish not, is my present design.

I. Like the prophet you are exposed to the storm of divine wrath, which every moment pursues and threatens to overwhelm you. This, my friends; is a truth, which, however painful it may be for us to declare, and for you to hear, is too important to be concealed, and too plainly taught in the word of God to be either evaded or denied. We are there told, that mankind are by nature children of wrath, having no hope, and without God in the world; that there is no peace to the wicked, but that God is angry with them every day; that his torso is in their house, and that he will rain upon them snares and fire, and a horrible tempest, which shall be the portion of their cup.

We are told that they have been unmindful of the Rock that begat them, and forgotten the God of their salvation; and that therefore God and many similar instances which experience, and the sacred writings afford, you cannot imagine that worldly prosperity is any proof, that God is not angry. Whatever therefore your external situation may be, if you are still in an unconverted state; God views you with holy anger and indignation; his wrath abides on you, and his curse pursues you, nor will it cease its pursuit, till you are reformed or destroyed.

In a word, my friends, this is your situation. You are embarked on the dangerous voyage of life in weak, frail, shattered vessels. On every side you are surrounded by rocks and quicksands, which your utmost skill can neither discover nor avoid. The clouds of divine displeasure frown dark and dreadful over your heads, and whether the approaching storm will burst this year, this day, or this hour, God only knows. If those of you, to whom these observations are addressed, have thought proper to listen with any degree of attention, you have doubtless heard them, in many instances, with perfect indifference, or consummate contempt.

To you, these awful denunciations of vengeance, probably, appear to be nothing more than the dreams of superstition, the mere phantoms and chimeras of a disordered imagination; and to be credibly assured

that some trifling accident or calamity was about to befall you, would occasion more alarm and uneasiness in your breasts, than all the woes and threatenings which the Scriptures contain. What is the reason, perhaps some of you will disdainfully ask, what is the reason we can see nothing of all these terrible evils which await us? why do we discover none of these impending dangers, why hear nothing of all these storms and tempests, which we are told every moment pursue, and threaten to overwhelm us!

I answer, because you are, in a spiritual sense, asleep, like the prophet; and like him insensible of your danger. This was the second point of resemblance between your situation and his, which we proposed to consider, and to this we shall now attend. II. You need not be informed, that the inspired writers employ various figurative expressions to describe the character and situation of impenitent sinners. Persons of this description, are represented sometimes as foolish, mad, or infatuated; sometimes as blind and senseless; sometimes as dead in trespasses and sins, and sometimes as slumbering or asleep.

To show the justice, beauty, and propriety of this last metaphorical expression, it would be easy to enumerate several particulars in which the state of unrenewed sinners resembles the situation of those who are asleep. Of these particulars, time will allow us at present to notice only the most striking. 1. Sleep is a state of insensibility. In many respects it resembles death. It entirely locks up the senses of those who are under its influence, so that they perceive nothing, and know nothing, of what is passing around them.

Of their own situation, they are perfectly unconscious. It may be safe, or dangerous, or critical in itself, but to them it is still the same. The day may dawn, and the sun arise on others, but he who is asleep, perceives not his beams. It may be a season of hurry and business, and his labor may be wanted; but he knows nothing of it. Place a mirror before him; he sees not his own image. Describe to him the character of the sluggard, he hears you not. Urge him to rise without delay; address him in the most moving and pathetic manner; invite or command, entreat or menace him, ply him with the most powerful arguments, the strongest motives, the most awful threatenings, or the most magnificent promises.

It is all in vain. The sound may strike upon his ears, but while he continues asleep, it makes no impression. Place him in the midst of a delightful garden, where the morning hymns of the feathered choirs combine with fragrant odors, beauteous flowers, and blushing fruits, to leave no sense ungratified. It gives him no pleasure. Surround his couch with enemies and dangers, present a dagger to his breast, or poison to his lips; place him in a forest infested with wild beasts, or on the crumbling brink of a cataract; still he sleeps securely and quietly as before.

In a word, his family and friends may be perishing around him for want of his assistance; his house may be wrapt in flames and threaten every moment to bury him in its blazing ruins; or, like Jonah, he may be exposed to immediate shipwreck and death, and yet far from knowing or suspecting his danger, he may be amused and delighted with fancies and shadows; for, 2. Sleep is a state of dreams and delusions. The nobler powers of the soul are then at rest, and imagination, a lawless, irreclaimable servant, embraces the opportunity to range and revel uncontrolled.

Touched by her magic wand, everything assumes a new and delusive appearance, and the bewildered sleeper forms strange, false and fantastic ideas of himself, his character, his situation and pursuits. The beggar dreams that he is heir to a throne, or possessor of immense wealth; the miserable wretch dreams that he is happy; the naked fancies that he is clothed; the hungry, that he is feasting; the thirsty, that he has found a refreshing spring; the ignorant, that he has become learned; the simple, that he has grown wise; and the criminal that he is innocent.

While they are thus deluded with regard to themselves, they are equally deceived in other respects. Though entirely unaffected with the realities around them, whether pleasant or painful, yet they are much engaged by their imaginary pursuits, and are rendered by them very happy or miserable. One imagines that he is flying from some impending evil, and another that he is following some flying good, and these fancied evils and blessings continue, so long as they are buried in sleep, to have all the force of realities on their minds.

Now, my friends, how exactly does this representation suit the character and situation of the unawakened sinner. He is, (1.) In a state of spiritual insensibility, a state which so much resembles moral death, that the word of God often describes him as actually dead. His spiritual senses are chained up under the power of that strong man armed who keeps his goods in peace, even the god of this world, who blinds the minds of those who perish, and works in all the children of disobedience.

The sinner has ears, but he hears not; he has eyes, but he sees not; he has taste, but he relishes not, the things of God. He knows nothing of the dangers of his situation; he is unconscious of what is passing around him; he sees none of the awful realities of the future and eternal world. The Sun of righteousness has arisen on the earth; but the sinner sees not his light, he feels not his warmth. The word of God, like a polished mirror, reflects most perfectly the sinner's moral image, but he does not perceive it.

Describe to him his own character, call upon him instantly to rise; tell him that life is the seed-time for eternity, that now is the accepted time and the day of salvation; that the night of death is fast approaching, and that he must be up and doing, or he will be miserable forever. He hears, as though he heard not. Set before him all the powerful motives and arguments which the word of God affords; reason, expostulate, urge, command, threaten, beseech, and entreat him; it is still the same.

Place him in the house of God, where the awakened Christian finds a foretaste of heaven in communion with Christ and his members; set before him the bowers of paradise, the songs of angels, the golden crowns, the tree of life, and the water of life; invite him to partake of the gospel feast, spread with all the dainties which infinite wisdom, love and power, could provide; nay, set forth Christ evidently crucified before him, --all affords him not the smallest satisfaction; all is heard with the most perfect indifference and insensibility.

And though his family and friends may, perhaps, be in danger of perishing eternally, for want of a good example, and suitable instructions from him; though he is surrounded by innumerable enemies, the weakest of whom could in an instant cut short the thread of life; though God, who has hitherto restrained them, is angry and threatens him with ruin, and that he is himself suspended as it were, by a single thread over the gulf which has no bottom, yet he is still unmoved, still the same. (2.)

The state of the unawakened sinner resembles sleep because it is a state of dreams and delusions. Imagination, passion and appetite deceive him; and though he is entirely unaffected with the things of his everlasting peace, and almost ignorant of their very existence, yet he is wholly engaged and swallowed up by the dreams and vanities of the world. He considers them as realities, and pursues or avoids them accordingly; and at the very moment that he sleeps on the crumbling verge of the grave, and that the storm which has pursued him so long is about to burst and blast him forever, he may, perhaps, be dreaming that he has acquired a great estate, and has nothing to do but eat, drink, and be merry; or that he has arrived at the summit of power and applause, and is surrounded by crowds of flatterers and dependents.

The drunkard dreams that he has grasped the cup of felicity; he drains it to the very dregs; and finds too late that it is poison. The infidel philosopher dreams that he is about to become as a god, knowing good and evil; but wakes and finds that he has been eating forbidden fruit. Thousands dream that they are pursued by some impending evil, such as poverty, contempt or pain, and in attempting to escape it, they fall into the hands of that God, who is a consuming fire. Others fancy that they are pursuing some fugitive good, but in the midst of their pursuit, stumble and fall to rise no more.

Thousands and millions, who are in reality poor, and miserable, and guilty, and vile, and weak, and foolish, and sinful, and wretched, dream that they are rich, and happy, and innocent, and strong, and wise, and holy; and thus they are evidently in the broad road to destruction, yet fancy that God is their friend, and heaven their portion. In short, the life of every unawakened sinner is nothing but a series of dreams, and follies, and divers vanities, in which realities have no place.

That this is, and always has been, the case, is evident from the word of God, and present experience. The inhabitants of the old world dreamed of safety and security, eating and drinking, and planting and building, till the flood came and destroyed them; so also it was with the Sodomites, who thought that Lot only mocked, when he threatened them with fire from heaven. And so our Saviour informs us it will be at the end of the world. We are assured in passages too numerous to mention particularly, that mankind are blind to the danger which threatens them, that their feet stand in slippery places, in darkness; that when they promise themselves peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them; that madness is in their hearts, while they live, and that after that, they go to the dead.

My friends, what a wretched, deplorable, and almost hopeless condition is yours, if you are still in an unconverted state. You are hastening, with a swift and increasing pace, to irreparable ruin; yet you know not your danger, and what renders your situation infinitely more dreadful is, that you do not wish to be told of it. The broad road in which you are walking, is so pleasant, and the society you there enjoy, so fascinating, that you cannot bear to give it up, nor to be told that it will lead you to destruction.

You love darkness rather than light, and it is this which renders your situation in a human view, altogether hopeless. Did you see the storm which threatens you, there would be some hope that you might escape it. Were you even willing to have it pointed out to you, your case would not be altogether desperate. But since you neither see it, nor wish to see it, we see no hope for you, but in the free, sovereign, unmerited mercy of God. He has commanded us to cry aloud and not spare; and though our arguments and calls can of themselves avail nothing, yet we must obey the command whether slumbering sinners will hear, or whether they forbear; and leave the event to him who sends us.

In entire dependence, therefore, on his grace, and with a faint hope that he may now awaken some of you to a sense of your perishing, deplorable situation, I address each unawakened sinner here present in the words of the text: What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise and call upon thy God. And, my friends, well may we ask what you mean, to sleep thus, when your souls are at stake, when such blackness, and darkness, and tempest hang over your heads, and when God himself is angry with you daily, even that God who holds you prisoners in the hollow of his hand; whose eye is ever upon you, who surrounds you on every side, and whose persevering goodness alone keeps you for a moment out of everlasting woe.

And have you then anytime to waste in sleep and security? Will you still say a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep? Will you still delay repentance and preparation for death, when you know not but death is even now at the door, and will, this night, require your soul? So

long as you remain unreconciled to God, all his creation are at war with you, and wait only his permission to destroy you in an instant. You have, therefore, no security for a single moment, and we solemnly charge you, in the name of God, to rise without delay, and call upon him in the name of his Son, that you may not perish forever.

Awake thou that sleepest, arise, call upon thy God, if so be thou perish not. If you do not believe the word of God, we must leave you to sleep till you are awakened by the last trump; but if you do acknowledge this word to be true, you cannot, without renouncing all claim to rationality, defer obedience a single hour. The madman who scatters firebrands arrows and death as in sport, or the criminal who jests and trifles under the gallows, are the wisest of philosophers, compared with those who sport with the wrath of God, and amuse themselves with trifles.

From those who are still in a state of slothful and dangerous security, we now turn to those whom God has been pleased to awaken. We would remind such, that though they will not again be permitted to sink into the same profound repose as before, yet there is great danger lest, while the bridegroom tarries, they should slumber and sleep. Let me, therefore, call on them to remember the often repeated injunction of our Lord to watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is. And permit me also to ask you, my Christian friends, whether you are not sinking into a drowsy frame; have you not forgotten your first love?

If so, I would call upon you, in the name of perishing neighbors, relations, children and friends; and say what mean ye, O sleepers, thus to sleep while we are perishing around you. Arise, call upon your God, if so be he will have mercy upon us that we perish not. My Christian friends, will you obey this affecting call? Will you not cry earnestly and unceasingly to God, to open their hearts to receive the truth? I am willing indeed to hope that you do not neglect this, but I beseech you to abound more and more.

Your prayers will not, shall not, cannot be lost. They may not, indeed, be answered immediately, but they will be answered, and they will bring down abundant blessings on your neighbors, families and friends. Redeem the time, then, from every thing, for this important duty. Remember that you are not your own, but God's, and he has not sent you here to rest, but to labor in season and out of season. Think of him who spent whole nights in prayer with strong cryings unto him that was able to save him from death; and who wept over rebellious Jerusalem when he foresaw her doom.

My friends, look at these perishing immortals before you. They are now, as you were once, in jeopardy. Have you no tears to shed for them, no prayers to send up in their behalf? Will you remain careless, and asleep, while multitudes of your fellow creatures are going down to everlasting death?

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