

Reason and Zeal for Drowsy Sinners

by Richard Baxter

Ministers must preach with all their might, with seriousness and earnestness, and with a deep sense of their own insufficiency, in order to awaken sleepy sinners and save them from eternal death.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 9:10, 1 Corinthians 9:16, Colossians 3:23, 2 Timothy 4:2, 1 Peter 4:11

Topics: "Eternal Salvation", "Evangelical Preaching"

Description

Richard Baxter emphasizes the importance of ministers preaching with utmost seriousness and earnestness, delivering messages about eternal life and damnation in a way that truly awakens and convicts sinners. He urges preachers to speak passionately and fervently, to apply doctrine closely and vividly, and to communicate with conviction and zeal, knowing that the eternal fate of their listeners is at stake. Baxter stresses the need for ministers to awaken their own hearts before attempting to awaken others, to pray earnestly for their congregation's faith and repentance, and to diligently carry out their ministerial work with all their might, recognizing the immense significance of their role in saving souls and advancing God's kingdom.

Transcript

If we were heartily devoted to our work, it would be done more vigorously, and more seriously, than it is by the most of us. How few ministers do preach with all their might, or speak about everlasting joys and everlasting torments in such a manner as may make men believe that they are in good earnest! It would make a man's heart ache, to see a company of dead, drowsy sinners sitting under a minister, and not hear a word that is likely to quicken or awaken them. Alas! we speak so drowsily and so softly, that sleepy sinners cannot hear. The blow falls so light that hard-hearted sinners cannot feel. The most of ministers will not so much as exert their voice, and stir up themselves to an earnest utterance. But if they do speak loud and earnestly, how few do answer it with weight and earnestness of matter! And yet without this, the voice doth little good; the people will esteem it but mere bawling, when the matter doth not correspond. It would grieve one to the heart to hear what excellent doctrine some ministers have in hand, while yet they let it die in their hands for want of close and lively application; what fit matter they have for convincing sinners, and how little they make of it; what good they might do if they would set it home, and yet they cannot or will not do it.

O sirs, how plainly, how closely, how earnestly, should we deliver a message of such moment as ours, when the everlasting life or everlasting death of our fellow-men is involved in it! Methinks we are in nothing

so wanting as in this seriousness; yet is there nothing more unsuitable to such a business, than to be slight and dull. What! speak coldly for God, and for men's salvation? Can we believe that our people must be converted or condemned, and yet speak in a drowsy tone? In the name of God, brethren, labor to awaken your own hearts, before you go to the pulpit, that you may be fit to awaken the hearts of sinners. Remember they must be awakened or damned, and that a sleepy preacher will hardly awaken drowsy sinners. Though you give the holy things of God the highest praises in words, yet, if you do it coldly, you will seem by your manner to unsay what you said in the matter. It is a kind of contempt of great things, especially of so great things, to speak of them without much affection and fervency. The manner, as well as the words, must set them forth. If we are commanded, 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might,' then certainly such a work as preaching for men's salvation should be done with all our might. But, alas, how few in number are such men! It is only here and there, even among good ministers, that we find one who has an earnest, persuasive, powerful way of speaking, that the people can feel him preach when they hear him.

. . . Speak to your people as to men that must be awakened, either here or in hell. Look around upon them with the eye of faith, and with compassion, and think in what a state of joy or torment they must all be for ever; and then, methinks, it will make you earnest, and melt your heart to a sense of their condition. Oh, speak not one cold or careless word about so great a business as heaven or hell. Whatever you do, let the people see that you are in good earnest. . . . You cannot break men's hearts by jesting with them, or telling them a smooth tale, or pronouncing a gaudy oration. Men will not cast away their dearest pleasures at the drowsy request of one that seemeth not to mean as he speaks, or to care much whether his request be granted or not. . . .

As we have reasonable creatures to deal with, and as they abuse their reason against the truth, we must see that our sermons be all convincing, and that we make the light of Scripture and Reason shine so bright in the faces of the ungodly, that it may even force them to see, unless they wilfully shut their eyes. A sermon full of mere words, how neatly soever it be composed, while it wants the light of evidence, and the life of zeal, is but an image or a well-dressed carcass.

In preaching, there is a communion of souls, and a communication of somewhat from ours to theirs. As we and they have understandings and wills and affections, so must the bent of our endeavors be to communicate the fullest light of evidence from our understandings to theirs, and to warm their hearts, by kindling in them holy affections as by a communication from our own. The great things which we have to commend to our hearers have reason enough on their side, and lie plain before them in the Word of God. We should, therefore, be furnished with all kind of evidence, so that we may come as with a torrent upon their understandings, and with our reasonings and expostulations to pour shame upon all their vain objections, and bear down all before us, that they may be forced to yield to the power of truth.

Our whole work must be carried on under a deep sense of our own insufficiency, and of our entire dependence on Christ. We must go for light, and life, and strength to him who sends us on the work. And when we feel our own faith weak, and our hearts dull, and unsuitable to so great a work as we have to do, we must have recourse to him, and say, 'Lord, wilt thou send me with such an unbelieving heart to persuade others to believe? Must I daily plead with sinners about everlasting life and everlasting death, and have no more belief or feeling of these weighty things myself? O, send me not naked and unprovided to the work; but, as thou commandest me to do it, furnish me with a spirit suitable thereto.' Prayer must carry on our work as well as preaching: he preacheth not heartily to his people, that prayeth not earnestly for them. If we prevail not with God to give them faith and repentance, we shall never prevail with them to

believe and repent. When our own hearts are so far out of order, and theirs so far out of order, if we prevail not with God to mend and help them, we are like to make but unsuccessful work.

The ministerial work must be carried on diligently and laboriously, as being of such unspeakable consequence to ourselves and others. We are seeking to uphold the world, to save it from the curse of God, to perfect the creation, to attain the ends of Christ's death, to save ourselves and others from damnation, to overcome the devil, and demolish his kingdom, to set up the kingdom of Christ, and to attain and help others to the kingdom of glory. And are these works to be done with a careless mind, or a lazy hand? O see, then, that this work be done with all your might! Study hard, for the well is deep, and our brains are shallow. . . . But especially be laborious in the practice and exercise of your knowledge. Let Paul's words ring continually in your ears, 'Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! ' Ever think with yourselves what lieth upon your hands: 'If I do not bestir myself, Satan may prevail, and the people everlastingly perish, and their blood be required at my hand. By avoiding labor and suffering, I shall draw on myself a thousand times more than I avoid; whereas, by present diligence, I shall prepare for future blessedness.' No man was ever a loser by God.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/richard-baxter/reason-and-zeal-for-drowsy-sinners/>

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