

# What meanest thou O sleeper

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[ 0 : 00 ] And we pick up at verse 6 once more where it says, The shipmaster came to him and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper?

Arise, call upon thy God. If so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not. Now we've been looking at the story of this great prophet of the Old Testament.

And we have seen how God spoke to him and directed him to go eastward to Nineveh with a message of judgment to that city for its appalling wickedness.

For today, Nineveh would be destroyed. But instead of giving obedience to what God had asked of him, we find the prophet taking ship and going westward to parties, putting himself as far away as possible from being in the will of God.

And it is no wonder that we find the situation progressively becoming worse for the prophet. And as we have seen, what happened was this.

[ 1 : 18 ] Although he tried to flee from his duty, and above all, although he tried to flee from God, he couldn't. Because, as it tells us, God sent out a great wind.

Indeed, the actual meaning of the words is this, that God, the Lord, fell the great wind into the sea. And there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

And then the mariners were afraid. Now, you see, you cannot escape from God in that way. No matter the ship that you may board, no matter the conditions that may prevail, no matter what you may try to do, you cannot escape from God.

If God has a will for you, if his will is for you to do something or other, you must obey. Now, we noticed here, last time we were together a fortnight ago, that what happened now was this, Jonah was down in the bowels of that ship, fast asleep.

And so he was rebuked for being asleep. The shipmaster came to him and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper?

[ 2 : 44 ] Here is this pagan man. And he is absolutely staggered that here is this godly prophet, sound asleep in the middle of the ship.

This was no place for Jonah to be. God's judgment was abroad. God's judgment was obvious. And yet here he is, sleeping through it all.

It's amazing how hardened a man can become. It's amazing how hardened we can become to the administrations of judgment that God may operate in our direction.

Indeed, we might even say it's passing strains that you should get so many free church people who come under the sound of the gospel. And they are living through an age of judgment.

And yet they can sleep soundly and it doesn't seem to matter to them whether they are saved or unsaved. It doesn't seem to matter to them whether they are on the road to heaven or on the way to hell.

[ 3 : 52 ] They couldn't care less. Even the very heathen are an example to us. Do they sit around and do nothing in the midst of the judgments that they see abroad in the world?

No, they go and sacrifice to their gods. And that is why this shipmaster came to Jonah and he said to Jonah, Jonah, I can't understand it. You sound asleep in this ship.

Our lives are in danger. We are almost at the point of death and here you are sound asleep in this ship. And he says to him, What meanest thou, O sleeper?

Arise, call upon thy God. I want us to go on now. We've looked at the rebuke that was administered by this captain. I want us to go on now to look at the proposal that he made to Jonah.

Because as you and I read through a story like this, there are so many lessons in it for us. And maybe it would be well for us just to sit down and consider what is God saying to me tonight through his word?

[ 5 : 06 ] What is God saying to me through this prophet Jonah? This story. This, and it's not a fictitious story, it's a thing that actually happened long, long ago.

Well then, let's look at the proposal that was made to Jonah. What was it? Arise, says this captain, call upon thy God.

If so, be that God will think upon us that we perish not. And so the first thing that this captain did to Jonah was to arouse the man from his sloth.

What meanest thou, O sleeper? Oh, how easily a man of God can be lulled to sleep in the very presence of sin. In this respect, let us go back and learn the lesson from Samson.

Here was this great man of God, Samson, who was sent often enough by God to go against the Philistines. And when it tells us that the Spirit of God came upon Samson, it means that the Holy Spirit came and moved the man.

[ 6 : 24 ] And yet, see how he was made to sleep in the lap of Delilah.

and his great strength left him. This wasn't a time for him to be sleeping.

This was a time for him to be in a state of realization that danger was around him. And then you remember in the darkest hour of the world's history, when the Son of God was about to be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, we read that while Jesus prayed, his disciples slept.

and it wasn't a time for them to be sleeping and resting. It was a time for these men who were around Jesus to be agonizing in prayer.

And at last, Jesus comes back to them and he says to them by way of rebuke, what? What, he says? Could you, could ye not watch with me one hour?

[ 7 : 49 ] Could you not even give me an hour of your time? That's all that was needed if you could just have given me an hour.

Could you not watch with me an hour? And Jesus says to them, watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.

The Spirit indeed is winning but the flesh is weak. And you see, this is one of the most difficult duties that we have to perform as Christians.

It's one of the most easy, it's one of the easiest. And yet, as I say, it's one of the most difficult to pray. Oh, it's easy enough for you to ask me to go to a meeting.

I'll go. Or if you want me to preach, I'll try and preach. Or if you want me even to go to the hospital and pray at the bedside of someone, I'll do that.

[ 8 : 47 ] I'll do almost anything. But pray in that agonizing fashion that we'll get a response from God.

Do you remember the wise man talking about it in Proverbs? He speaks about slothfulness.

And he says, slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep. That's what laziness does. It casts us into a deep sleep.

And you recall the vivid description that is given of the field of the slothful. There it is, says the wise man in the book of Proverbs.

Look at the field of that lazy man. It's grown over with thorns and nettles. The stone wall is broken down.

[ 9 : 48 ] Everywhere you look around you, you see nothing but desolation. Now, why is that field like that? Why is there this picture of desolation over that field?

Well, this is the reason. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep, so shall thy poverty come as one that traveleth and thy want as an armed man.

That's the reason. The farmer there, instead of being up and about his business, was sound asleep. Just like Jonah, sound asleep.

And here is this pagan and he comes to him and he says to him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise and call upon thy God. We are told also in the book of Proverbs, or rather, it's the book of Ecclesiastes.

And there is no proof required to demonstrate the truth of this in that book where it says in Ecclesiastes, by much slothfulness the building decayeth and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.

[ 11 : 10 ] Nothing can be more obvious than that. You neglect a building, you, we neglect this building, what's going to happen? The roof is going to cave in. All the signs of neglect will soon be seen and the building will be past redemption.

all because of our neglect. And you know, this is what we find the Bible challenging us about so often.

It's challenging us to come out of this sleep condition that so often overtakes us. You remember in the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins, Jesus emphasizes the all-important duty of watchfulness.

You see, here were these wise and foolish virgins sound asleep and suddenly the cry went up, Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him.

Ah, well, the wise virgins, although they were asleep, they were ready. Their lamps were ready. Yes, the bridegroom was there at the door.

[12:29] They were ready to meet him. Oh, but the foolish virgins, you see, they had made no preparation at all. And when they awoke, they suddenly said to their companions, You must help us.

We've got nothing. We've got no preparation made. Oh, they said, It's too late. We can't help you now. You should have made your preparation long ago.

How necessary then the Bible urges upon us the necessity of watchfulness. And here was this ship sailing that sea.

And the waves of God's judgment were crashing upon that ship. everyone else was awake except this man of God who is sound asleep.

And at last this godless captain gets a hold of him by the arm and gives him a shake and says to him, Jonah, you must waken. Look at what's happening to us.

[13:44] Look at our ship. Look at these mountainous seas. God's judgments are abroad. You must waken.

And you know the strange thing is this, although this man tried to get Jonah to desist from his indifference, the strange thing is this, that even although Jonah was awakened from his sleep, you know he didn't resort to prayer.

That was the very last thing in the man's mind to start to pray, as far as we can see from the story. You see, it took the terrifying experience of the sea monster and that was going to come.

And what God was saying to Jonah was this, very well then Jonah, if you will not respond to me now, I'll see to it that you respond to me sooner or later.

You may think that my judgments will pass as soon as these sailors cast you into the sea, but I tell you this Jonah, I have even greater experiences for you to go through and they are going to be terrifying.

[15:10] Oh, the man, you might say, was out of his mind, wouldn't you? And here is another point in this incident here.

He was asked, you see, to consider the gravity of the situation. call upon thy God it so be that God will think upon us that we perish not.

What a sin confronted Jonah. When he left Tarshish, Joppa, there were sunny skies and calm seas, but now as he looked around and what did he see?

Ah, it wasn't sunny skies and gentle breezes, it's mountainous seas, and before him there is this captain and he is terror stricken and not only is the captain in this condition but so is the crew.

And in such a case the lives of all on board that ship were in imminent danger and even this pagan captain realized that the only hope that they had was to go to God in prayer for he had his own ideas of God.

[16:56] Jonah had his ideas about God. But at least this pagan man comes to Jonah and he says call upon thy God if so be that God will think upon us that we perish not.

God and how strange it is that the man of God was not aware of the danger. Indeed when we see this idolatrous captain making Jonah aware of the seriousness of the storm is that not a picture to us of the world rebuking the church here is the world in the person of the sea captain here is the church in the person of Jonah and wouldn't you have thought that it would have been the church that was awake and alive instead of that it's the world that is awake and alive and how often we see sometimes the world that we are living in suffering because of its sin and yet it's the world that does everything that is required and we in the church sit and do nothing it might be that suddenly there is a famine in some part of

Africa or some part of India and the conscience of the world is awakened and although they do not do what they do in the name of God yet we are thankful for what they do because there they go and

they feel the sense of need this urgency that lies upon them that they must do something and yet here we are in the church and as often as not we do nothing it's it's the same it's the political conferences that take place when there is a crisis and the world seems to be heading for some calamity some great war is going to take place and so the politicians sit around the table and they discuss the matter with one another and they try to negotiate for the peace of the world and what do we do in the church nothing and the seas may be crashing about us the seas of God's judgment and like

Jonah we are fast asleep what was he urged to do the ship master came to him and said unto him what meanest thou O sleeper you're sleeping there it's time for you to be awake call upon thy God if so be that God will think upon us that we perish not he was urged to pray call upon thy God you see this ship master like his own men on board that ship he as well as they had no confidence in their own gods after all what were their gods just idols their idols were just like the idols that we read about in the book of the prophet Isaiah pieces of stone pieces of wood carved out by the hands of men and adorned with precious metals and so on but what good were they they couldn't help in a situation like this you remember how

Jeremiah speaks about the Israelites who had turned to idolatry and I suppose the charge that he leveled against the Israelites he could level against these men on board that ship they were saying to a stock thou art my father and to a stone thou hast brought me forth for they have turned their back unto me and not their face but in the time of their trouble they will say arise and save us but where are thy gods that thou hast made let them arise if they can save thee in the time of thy troubles says God and so here was this ship master with his men and they came to Jonah and they said look will you please pray will you begin to pray to your God God and sometimes you know the world around us although they might disparage what we believe in and so on yet there might be times when the world around us would be glad if we in the church started to pray in the way that they want us to pray do you remember

[ 22 : 26 ] Pharaoh that obstinate sinner that he was there came a day when he realized how insignificant his magicians and his sorcerers were in the presence of God's power and you remember how in the hour of God's judgment upon him Pharaoh came to Moses and to Aaron and Pharaoh said to them look will you pray for me will you pray for me that God's hand in judgment will be lifted I can't stand these plagues that are coming I can't stand all these things that are happening to my people and to myself will you not pray for me and they did and God lifted his hand in judgment but again and oh how prevailing the intercession of godly people can be on behalf of others you remember

Abraham when he started to plead for Sodom ah he says to God will you destroy Sodom if there are fifty good men in the place oh no says God I not destroyed for fifty and so Abraham the great man goes on his knees again to God and he says will you destroy it if there are only forty and then thirty and twenty and so he brings the number down but the point about Abraham's intercession is this you notice how effective it was and every time he made a request to God God complied and said yes Abraham I won't destroy it if there are that number of people and you pray I won't destroy it you remember too how Lot pleaded for the township of

Zor when he left the smoking ruins of Sodom and he said to God do you see that city there Zor it's only a little city I would like to live there please he says to God will you spare it and God spared Zor I don't suppose the people in that little township ever understood how much they owed to Lot for his prayers and you recall how Moses pleaded for the children of Israel Israel how Moses interceded with God for the children of Israel and you remember how God demanded this of Job's accusers these three men who had accused him of being a wicked man God said to them after it was all over and after

God had shown that he was putting his servant through a test God said to these three wicked men now you go to Job ask him to pray for you only his intercession for you will save you you see it's what we were reading in James isn't it where it tells us in that epistle that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much and it tells us there about Elijah how he was a man subject to like passions as we are he prayed earnestly that it might not rain on the earth for three and a half years and it never did and then he interceded again and he prayed earnestly to God that it might rain and the rain came and the earth brought forth her fruit you see in his poem

Lord Tennyson it's in that poem called The Passing of Arthur he tells us about the hero and he says this in the poem more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of wherefore let thy

voice rise like a fountain for me day and night and so this mariner came to Jonah using almost the same words we might say as Temism and he says to Jonah arise call upon thy God if so be that God will think upon us but we perish not we must never forget and never minimize the efficacy of prayer in his parable of the friend who came at midnight for bread

[ 27 : 56 ] Jesus underlines for us how unfortunate we must be in prayer and Jesus says this ask and it shall be given you seek and ye shall find knock and it shall be opened to you for everyone that asketh receiveth he that seeketh findeth and to him that knocketh it shall be opened and so this is what we have to do in our own day isn't it Christian friend am I speaking to you tonight as I speak to myself is there something that is a concern to you do you have an unconverted member in your family well are you going to pray for them or do you say you know I stopped praying I've lost heart well we must say to you you mustn't lose heart you must continue instant in season out of season arise call upon thy

God is it something that you have been seeking and you feel that it is in the will of God and you've been praying and the answer hasn't been forthcoming well what have you done have you given up well here comes the word to us tonight what meanest thou O sleeper arise call upon thy God look are you concerned about the church and the influence of the church and you say oh well the church is so poor and the church is so dead and there seems to be nothing happening in the church today is it because you've been sleeping and

God comes to you and he says to you arise and call upon thy God you know God's judgments are abroad you know we don't know what we're going to have tomorrow when we turn on the morning news is it some other calamity is it another catastrophe and here we are in the church sleeping on our beds of sloth we couldn't care less we are quite happy as things are going on so long as it's not affecting us and so long as we are happy perhaps even in this congregation it's not affecting us and yet the seas of God's judgment are crashing around us and even the very world is saying what meanest thou O sleeper arise call upon thy God isn't it our

Lord who says if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask it shall be done for them of my father which is in heaven now let me bring in a word here it might be a very personal word I don't mean it to be that I just want to say what goes through my own mind and I speak to myself as I speak to you you know we have a midweek prayer meeting every Wednesday we meet for prayer you might say what do you do at the prayer meeting it's such a boring sort of meeting just going along there to sit to dull prayers do you know what we're trying to do we're supplicating God and asking God to send the blessing at least you could be there to put your amen to the prayer and say yes Lord send the blessing send the revival send the quickness isn't it only too true my dear friend that you and

I want the revival but we don't want what is involved in the revival we want the good things the meetings the conversions the excitement all the other things that create an atmosphere in the congregation oh we want these things things but you know it's going to cost us a lot by way of our time by way of our intercession by our pleading with God and if you don't actually pray yourself at the prayer meeting you can be there to say yes God answer the prayer send revival bring about the quickening you see when we look at the success of

[ 33 : 23 ] Spurgeon in the tabernacle in London what did he attribute it to was it simply his great gifts of oratory and his preaching oh well there was that in it as well and there can only be a Spurgeon but at least he could thank God for the people who were there behind him to pray and those of us who are much less men than Spurgeon if he needed the prayers of the people of London my dear friend how much do I need your prayers in the work here think of the success of Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission he saw there the needs of the Chinese he went but he left a band of praying men and praying women who followed him with their prayers and is it any wonder that there was such a success with regard to the

China Inland Mission maybe this is what we haven't done as a church with regard to our own missions maybe we haven't set aside enough time to pray for these fields in India in South America in South Africa so that even to this day there are Chinese people who rise up and they call Hudson Taylor blessed blessed but it's not only Hudson Taylor that they should call blessed but these great praying people who followed him throughout the length and breadth of that great country China and who prayed that God would bless him and so this great proposal is made to Jonah arise call upon thy God if so be that God will think upon us that we perish not and maybe on behalf of the people of

Inverness I come to you tonight in this congregation and I say to you on their behalf what meanest thou O sleeper and it comes to me as well arise call upon thy God if so be that God will think upon us in Inverness that we perish not and God only knows how the people in Inverness are perishing going to a lost eternity and we are sleeping well in this text and I leave it there Jonah deserved this rebuke for what he didn't do and you and I deserve the same rebuke for what we are not doing as a Christian church this is one of the greatest hours of need we mustn't sleep we must awake and the proposal made to Jonah couldn't have been greater and yet at the same time in a sense it couldn't have been easier he was a man who knew God he knew how to pray this was the weapon he could use with the greatest advantage the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds and with this mighty weapon of prayer may you and I begin to pull down these strongholds of the devil in this town of Inverness and throughout this land of ours oh may

God awaken us and may God make us into praying men and praying women let us pray most gracious God we confess before thee here tonight that we have been sleeping we don't want to get too much disturbed about these matters we don't want to become too involved oh God in the situation of distress spiritual distress that is around us and yet thou art speaking to us through thy word and saying to us in the words of this heathen man of long ago what meanest thou oh sleeper arise call upon thy God if so be that God will think upon us that we perish not and so for thy glory sake and for the sake of the perishing men and women around us give us grace to arise and to call upon thee in

[ 39 : 00 ] Jesus name we ask it Amen