

Awake thou that sleepest

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] I would like now to turn you to Paul's letter to the Ephesians and chapter 5. Ephesians and chapter 5 and reading from verse 14.

Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

Ephesians and chapter 5 If you read Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 58, you find there a passage that is often referred to on a day, for example, like the fast day of a communion.

And there is a reference to what God would seem and would deem appropriate in the life and the experience of the believer with regarding to what is acceptable fasting.

Or if we may apply it another way, what is acceptable repentance? I think very often we are inclined to put on something by way of repentance.

[1 : 46] It is appropriate, it is accepted on the fast day that this is the day when we do some heart searching. This is the day when we ask ourselves, what is my relationship to God?

And this is the day when we ask ourselves, what is my relationship to God? And this is the day in particular, when having sought out all of these things, we find ourselves still to be very much short of what God, what Christ would expect of us as believers.

And then we may seek to develop an exercise, which I'm not sure that is spiritually healthy for us.

We may do what the prophecy of Isaiah tells us we shouldn't do. We shouldn't use the fast day to exercise some kind of affliction upon our souls.

Is this the fast, says God to the prophet, that I've ordained? A day for a man to afflict his soul?

[2 : 52] Is that what it's all about? That we should take every passage of scripture that may be traditionally referred to over a fast day of a communion?

And should we try in some way to beat these souls down? Should we have some kind of self-affliction of our souls?

That we would not only find ourselves necessarily repenting of our sin, but going beyond what the whole thing is all about. God is not asking us to afflict our souls, to set about something, to do something by way of an outward action maybe, to afflict ourselves.

In fact, it's the very opposite. The sensitive soul, the spirit-filled soul, will always be conscious of that affliction.

In some of the psalms, and I hope in all of the psalms that I was seeking to choose for our looking at this today, each one of them refers to the state of the believer that is not, as it were, artificially applied or artificially produced.

[4 : 09] It is the outward activity of the life of the believer, knowing what he or she is before a thrice's holy God.

Maybe many of you are here this afternoon, shuddering, fearful, desperately fearful, knowing that maybe you are not what you should be.

You know more than anybody else knows, apart from God, the many of offenses that you have committed, not since the last communion, but maybe even since last Sabbath, or since last you heard the word.

Maybe you are afraid about coming to the table of the Lord. Maybe you believe yourself not to be worthy of those things that Christ has provided for our spiritual goat.

I don't think it's right to use a fast day for some kind of artificial, spiritual, if I can even put these two words together, some kind of activity whereby we might try and present ourselves differently to what we did yesterday, or to what we might do after the communion is over.

[5 : 31] And I want us to look at this passage in Ephesians in particular, with reference also to this song that we also read in. Because I think in what the Apostle Paul is teaching us here, there is plenty for us, not to have an artificial affliction of soul, but plenty for us there to contemplate regarding the condition of our soul, its real condition.

The Apostle says there, Arise, arise, he says, awake, he says. Listen to these words again. Wherefore he saith, awake, thou that sleepest, and rise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

Now I know we could speak of two constituents, two sets of people to whom these words could always be applied, both to the believer and to the unbeliever.

It's not my purpose this afternoon to address the unbeliever directly. Maybe I will do a little application of that in a little while. But what I'm really concerned about is what the Apostle Paul here seems to be telling us with regard to the condition, or the possible condition, of any single one of us.

Arise, he is saying. Awake, he says. Thou that sleepest. Now I think that there are maybe many conditions through which you and I may come as believers, which must give us great thought for concern, great soul searching.

[7 : 10] But one of the most dangerous ones, I think, for your spiritual well-being and mine, is that one that evidences itself as the sleepy Christian, the sleepy believer.

And that covers a multitude. We're not talking about the difficulties sometimes that we have, humanly speaking, of keeping awake in church.

That's not necessarily the evidence of a sleepy Christian. But certainly there are evidences in Scripture that tell us and speak to us of what a sleepy Christian is.

Would you be offended, for example, if the Apostle Paul was to challenge you with this word and say to you, Awake, you are asleep. As far as the gospel of God is concerned, as far as Christ is concerned, you are no longer what you once were.

You are asleep. And you need to be awakened out of your sleep. Or maybe you're saying to yourself, Ah, but I'm not like other men are.

[8 : 17] I'm not the kind of person that is asleep. I'm not asleep spiritually. I'm alive spiritually. I think it's good for us, on a fast day of a communion season, to let us be honest.

Let us be like the church of which it is referred to there in the Song of Solomon. Because I think there you have honesty and integrity with regard to what is suggested there.

Go back to the song again for a moment or two. And the very first words of verse 2, what does it say? What's the confession of the church? What is she saying?

I sleep. That's her confession. I sleep. The suggestion being, of course, there, is that she is away from Christ.

Christ. Or Christ is away from her for a time. But in order not to put, as it were, a negative aspect on this whole thing, I would hope and I would pray that each and every one of us, myself included, although at times we may be asleep, at least we become very conscious of our sleepy Christian condition.

[9 : 38] That we are not as faithful to Christ as we should be. What is the spouse in the song saying? When she says, I sleep.

What is she actually saying? She is making here a confession about a condition that she dislikes. She is not happy with her condition.

Or there may be many of us as Christians who are quite happy to go on day after day unconcerned about the sleepy condition of her soul.

But the church in the song is certainly not like that. And maybe that is what I want to suggest to you and hope that that is an encouragement to you. That even if you do acknowledge that at times you are asleep, you know it and you confess it.

You acknowledge to God that you are asleep and that you lament your spiritual condition. It is a sign of hell.

[10 : 41] It is not the best of hell. It is not the church that doesn't need the physician. The church here does need the physician. But at least the disease, for the want of a better expression, is known.

And if the disease in your spiritual condition is one of sleepiness and you know it, at least you are on the road to getting better. You may, you should improve.

But are you not like every other believer today who is in that condition lamenting it? And you're not looking for a scapegoat.

You're not looking for somebody else to blame for the very fact that you are not what you should be. You're not looking for someone else to, as it were, blame for your sin.

The sin that has come about as a result of your sleepiness. You lament your condition because you know that you yourself are greatly responsible for it.

[11 : 45] Are you not like the church? Or are you not like Jeremiah? Are you not crying out from the depth of your soul, Oh, that I knew where I might find him.

I want him. That was the church's testimony in the song as well, as it was for Jeremiah. The church wanted the Lord. The church wanted the bridegroom.

The church wants Christ. Because after all, there is none that is like unto him, fairest among ten thousand. These great attributes of Christ are things that can often be far distant from us in our experience.

No longer, maybe, is he the altogether lovely one and the prince of peace. I am a slave. Let me take you into the New Testament again for a practical example of this.

You remember before the Lord Jesus was betrayed. Before the Lord Jesus was betrayed, you remember he broke bread and he gave the cup in that upper room with his disciples.

[13 : 00] And that ought to have been for the disciples a great moment of blessing to them. But it was a blessing that seems at times, as we evidence it, as though it was falling upon deaf ears.

The blessing didn't seem to last for very long. And we are told that when Jesus, you remember, went into the Garden of Gethsemane, and you remember he said to the disciples, wait here while I go and pray.

And you remember after he had prayed, and we remember the situation, maybe we'll come back to this before the weekend. Remember when he was there in the garden and how he prayed and the very condition of his own soul, his physical condition as well, as he wept there, as he poured out his soul in the garden.

And then he arises from prayer and he goes to the disciples and what does he see? What is the witness? Their sleep.

And Jesus says to them, and it's very poignant, the words that Jesus uses to these disciples, he says to them, what he says, could you not even watch for one hour?

[14 : 14] Do you not feel guilty every time you read those words that Jesus addresses to the disciples on that moment, on that hour of his greatest need?

Do you never feel guilty yourself as a believer, knowing how often you have fallen asleep when the cause of Christ was needing your attention the most?

I sleep. The church sleeps. And a sleepy church.

And myself, who is awake all the time, far from it. And every minister of the gospel, every elder of the church, every believer knows the great fight it is to keep awake and to keep alive.

Awake, thou that sleepest, says Paul to the Ephesians. The church says in response, I am asleep.

[15 : 21] That's my confession. That is what is behind the whole spirit of my repentant heart. I am asleep. Do we go around the day sometimes thinking to ourselves, I can't be asleep because after all, I do not commit all the sins that the world commits.

I do not go into all these debased situations that the world goes into. I'm not someone that would sit in front of the television and watch programs that would be an offense to Christ and offense to a soul that desires Christ.

You say, I'm not one of those. And therefore, maybe you say and conclude, but I'm not asleep then. please, my friends, as I speak to you as one who has known much of that sleepy state, it's the most dangerous.

It's the devil's opportunity to reach out and tear from you everything that was a blessing during the times that you knew the awakening of the Lord.

You may be thankful to God that there are certain sins that would not be once named amongst you, certain sins that you have never, by the grace of God, fallen into.

[16 : 55] But don't ever say to yourself, I've never fallen asleep. Acknowledge the sleepiness of your state in so many ways.

What does the church do? What does the church in the song do? Yes, it almost complains, not blaming somebody, but is complaining about its condition.

The church there, the bride there, is complaining and she abhors the state and she acknowledges the danger of that state.

A state of inaction. What was wrong with Peter? When Peter, you remember, confess to the Lord Jesus Christ, thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

There was, as far as evidence has it, there was nothing wrong. But the moment that Peter said to the Lord, though all deny thee, I will never deny thee.

[18 : 17] That was the moment of danger and it should be the warning light to every single believer. You stand up, maybe in your own strength for a time and you stand up in the strength of the fellowship and you say, it will never happen to me.

You remember what Jesus says to every single Christian as he said it to the apostle Peter? Peter, Simon Peter, Satan has desired to have you that he might sift you like wheat.

The most dangerous presumption, the dangerous spirit of the believer is a presumptuous spirit. That's a dangerous condition to say, I'll never happen to me. It won't happen to me.

I will never fall asleep. I will never fall into these sins, especially these gross sins of which the apostle Paul is here speaking. I don't think there is one if you could stand up in the church this afternoon and say, it would never happen to me.

If it happened to Peter, it could happen to any one of us. Peter said, though all deny thee, I will never deny thee.

[19 : 42] Jesus said, today, Peter, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me three times.

Are you really so repentant in heart, so conscious of your own real condition? and let us remember we all have great potential.

Great potential to do evil or to do good. Listen to what the apostle is saying. Wherefore, he saith, awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead.

What is Paul saying there? He's telling us, surely is he not? that a sleepy Christian is like someone dead. So ineffective, so lacking in growth, so stilted, his witness or her witness, his testimony or her testimony would be just as though he never, ever believed in Christ at all.

and I wonder how many situations in our own daily lives maybe in the last week where we know we have a sin to repent of.

[21 : 12] Oh, not some great moral sin necessarily, but the very sin that the apostle Paul spoke of when you remember he said, forgive me, basically he was saying, for those sins, those things that I ought to have done and I have left undone.

It's not that I have committed some moral sin necessarily, but there are lots of things that the Lord requires of me that I haven't done. maybe it is laziness to read the word.

Maybe it is forgetfulness of the great preciousness of Christ's love toward you as a redeemed soul. Maybe it is that you have not witnessed and testified in the situation where you know you should have done.

For the apostle Paul, Christ was his every word. What did the apostle say to the church at Rome? I am ready, he said.

I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. And he was ready. You know why he was ready?

[22 : 35] Because of the grace that was bestowed upon him and because through that grace he could utter these time-honored words as every Christian would be loved to be able to as it were practice in his or her life.

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ but it is the power of God unto salvation to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Awake, says the apostle, thou that sleepest and rise from the dead. why is the apostle Paul warning of this dangerous condition to be in?

This almost spiritual death. Not a blanket death, not like the unbeliever, not like the Christless in soul, but almost as though you were like them.

Remember Paul writing to the Romans in chapter 13. He says something, does he not like this, with regard to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[23 : 47] This is what he says in chapter 13, I'll just read it to you. And that knowing, he says, that the time that now it is high time to awake out of sleep.

Why? Why was it high time to awake out of sleep? Well, says the apostle Paul, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

In other words, the apostle is putting the challenge out there. We should be awake because we are nearer the final, the full salvation that we have all been hoping for.

Instead of our spiritual life becoming dim, it should be glowing brighter and brighter. We should be becoming more lively like the apostle Peter speaks of.

These lively stones, these living stones that express true life. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us therefore, he says, cast off the works of darkness.

[24 : 49] Why? Because Christ is coming. Now it is our longing, it is our hope, that Christ will be here at the feast on the Sabbath day.

And I hope that every single heart of us is looking forward to that Sabbath day to be with Christ at his table in response to his invitation.

But it will be nothing, it will be like a sleepy communion. If before our mind's eye, our whole spiritual eye, we are not seeing what the apostle is seeing, the day at hand, Christ is coming.

And if you are looking forward to the communion season, and that's the end, then you will be a sleepy Christian coming to it.

But if you look forward to the communion season, knowing that this is a reminder to us, do this in remembrance of me, for as often as you do this, as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you do show forth the Lord's death till he come.

[26 : 02] Are you and I sleepy Christians? We cannot see beyond one communion. We can't see beyond it what the whole purpose of it all is, as Paul is telling us there in Romans.

Awake thou that sleepest. arise, and Christ will give thee light. What light? Christ will give you light.

I don't have to tell you what light. You know what the light is. Because as believers, you have already experienced that light. You know it. You've felt it.

Christ Jesus came into this world to bring light into these dark lives. Christ is the light of the world. He is for your soul and my soul.

He means everything. If I want to know anything about my soul's well-being, I look to Christ. If I want to know anything of the time that is yet to be, I look to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[27 : 17] Christ shall give you light, says the apostle. But what that light does, more than anything else, for you and I, this side of eternity, it dispels the darkness.

How great is the darkness? How deep is the darkness? I think sometimes our condition can be very much like that that is recorded for us in Jeremiah's prophecy in Lamentations, that great lamentation experience.

Do you remember how Jeremiah speaks of the church there? Do you remember it is a reference to the condition, the spiritual condition of Israel?

And he's looking at this great city, and he sees the gates that were covered with gold, but the enemy had entered in.

And Jeremiah says this, how, he says, is the gold gone dim? How is it gone dim?

[28 : 35] How is it that your Christianity goes dim? How is it that darkness envelopes our souls? There's only one reason, because of our sin, and the sin of unbelief.

It's one, it's the most dangerous sin of all, the sin of unbelief in the believer. But I believe you with an encouragement, I hope. because again, if I go back to the song, just for a moment, in the song there, the bride says, I sleep, but my heart awakens.

And who's wakening the heart of the bride? It's the bridegroom. why is it that the sleepy bride has been awakened?

Because she's hearing the bridegroom at the door, and he is knocking. He's wanting to come in. He's been kept out in the cold too long.

Is that the way it is with you and I? Has Christ been kept out in the cold too long? My believing friends, be encouraged.

[30 : 03] If you are asleep and you make that your confession and you repent of the sinfulness of the sleepy state, be thankful to Christ the moment that you hear him knocking at the door and he says, I want to come in.

I want to be the center of your life, I do. I want to be your all in all. And you respond like the bride and you say, so do I.

I don't want it to be anything else. I want our love. We want our love to be united in Christ. Don't afflict your soul irrationally, artificially.

pray. You know your condition before Christ. If it's sleepy, if it's a state of unbelief, cry to him, shout to him.

Read through Psalm 88 again. Listen to these words of the soul that is really crying, out of whatever condition, crying to Christ.

[31 : 16] That's the best repentance that you could ever have. Shall we pray? O Lord, our gracious God, who is fit for these things?

Thy word is such a challenge to us and our responses to the challenge are so inadequate. O help us, we pray thee, no matter how weak we are, how frail we are, give us that ability and the light of truth to display and to beam upon our hearts and souls, that not only would we believe that we are sinners, but that we would also believe that he is faithful to forgive and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

O Lord, we pray that if there be any of us who are keeping Christ outside and that not allowing him in because of many other things that are an offence to him, O Lord, do thou convict us, challenge us and give us the spirit of repentance and give us grace and faith to seek the door opening and that Christ would come in and that he would give us his honey.

Forgive all offence and accept of us and the beloved. Amen.