

~Other Speakers M-R: Old Paths Magazine - Issue 17:

Sin Has Spoiled And Marred

"Therefore let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober."—1 Thessalonians 5:6.

WHAT SAD THING SIN hath done. This fair world of ours was once a glorious temple, every pillar of which reflected the goodness of God, and every part of which was a symbol of good, but sin has spoiled and marred all the metaphors and figures that might be drawn from earth. It has so deranged the divine economy of nature, that those things which were inimitable pictures of virtue, goodness, and divine plenitude of blessing, have now become the figures and representatives of sin. 'Tis strange to say, but it is strangely true, that the very best gifts of God have by the sin of man become the worst pictures of man's guilt. Behold the flood! breaking forth from its fountains, it rushes across the fields, bearing plenty on its bosom; it covers them awhile, and anon it doth subside and leaves upon the plain a fertile deposit, into which the farmer shall cast his seed and reap an abundant harvest. One would have called the breaking forth of water a fine picture of the plenitude of providence, the magnificence of God's goodness to the human race; but we find that sin has appropriated that figure to itself. The beginning of sin is like the breaking forth of waters. See the fire! how kindly God hath bestowed upon us that element, to cheer us in the midst of winter's frosts. Fresh from the snow and from the cold we rush to our household fire, and there by our hearth we warm our hands, and glad are we. Fire is a rich picture of the divine influences of the Spirit, a holy emblem of the zeal of the Christian; but, alas! sin hath touched this, and the tongue called "a fire;" "it is set on fire of hell," we are told, and it is so evidently full often, when it uttereth blasphemy and slanders; and Jude lifts up his hand and exclaims, when he looks upon the evils caused by sin, "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth." And then there is sleep, one of the sweetest of God's gifts, fair sleep

"Tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep."

Sleep God hath selected as the very figure for the repose of the blessed. "They that sleep in Jesus," saith the Scripture. David puts it amongst the peculiar gift's of grace: "So he giveth his beloved sleep." But alas! sin could not let even this alone. Sin did over-ride even this celestial metaphor; and though God himself had employed sleep to express the excellence of the state of the blessed, yet sin must have even this profaned, ere itself can be expressed. Sleep is employed in our text as a picture of a sinful condition. "Therefore let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober."

An Evil To Be Avoided

With that introduction, I shall proceed at once to the text. The "sleep" of the text is an evil to be avoided. In the second place, the word "therefore" is employed to show us that there are certain reasons for the avoiding of this sleep. And since the apostle speaks of this sleep with sorrow, it is to teach us that there are some, whom he calls "others," over whom it is our business to lament, because they sleep, and do not watch, and are not sober.

The Sleeper

The sleeper knoweth not anything. Behold how the refuse of mankind are alike in this! Of some things they know much, but of spiritual things they know nothing; of the divine person of the adorable Redeemer they have no idea; of the sweet enjoyments of a life of piety they can not even make a guess; toward the high enthusiasms and the inward raptures of the Christian they can not mount. Talk to them of divine doctrines, and they are to them a riddle; tell them of sublime experiences, and they seem to them to be enthusiastic fancies. They know nothing of the joys that are to come; and alas! for them, they are oblivious of the evils which shall happen to them if they go on in their iniquity. The mass of mankind are ignorant; they know not; they have not the knowledge of God, they have no fear of Jehovah before their eyes; but, blind-folded by the ignorance of this world, they march on through the paths of lust to that sure and dreadful end, the everlasting ruin of their souls. Brethren, if we be saints, let us not be ignorant as are others. Let us search the Scriptures, for in them we have eternal life, for they do testify of Jesus. Let us be diligent; let not the Word depart out of our hearts; let us meditate therein both by day and night, that we may be as the tree planted by the rivers of water. "Let us not sleep as do others."

A State Of Insensibility

Again, sleep pictures a state of insensibility. There may be much knowledge in the sleeper, hidden, stored away in his mind, which might be well developed, if he could but be awakened. But he hath no sensibility, he knoweth nothing. The burglar hath broken into the house; the gold and silver are both in the robber's hands; the child is being murdered by the cruelty of him that hath broken in; but the father slumbereth, though all the gold and silver that he hath, and his most precious child, are in the hands of the destroyer. He is unconscious, how can he feel, when sleep had utterly sealed his senses! Lo! in the street there is mourning. A fire hath just now burned down the habitation of the poor, and houseless beggars are in the street. They are crying at his window, and asking him for help. But he sleeps, and what wots he, though the night be cold, and though the poor are shivering in the blast? He hath no consciousness; he feeleth not for them. There! take the title-deed of his estate, and burn the document. There! set light to his farm-yard! burn up all that he hath in the field; kill his horse and destroy his cattle; let now the fire of God descend and burn up his sheep; let the enemy fall upon all that he hath and devour it. He sleeps as soundly as if he were guarded by the angel of the Lord.

Such are the refuse of mankind. But alas! that we should have to include in that word "refuse" the great bulk thereof! How few there are that feel spiritually! They feel acutely enough any injury to their body, or to their estate; but alas! for their spiritual concerns they have no sensation whatever! They are standing on the brink of hell, but they tremble not; the anger of God is burning against them, but they fear not; the sword of Jehovah is unsheathed, but terror doth not seize upon them. They proceed with the merry dance; they drink the bowl of intoxicating pleasure; they revel and they riot, still do they sing the lascivious song; yea, they do more than this; in their vain dreams they do defy the Most High, whereas, if they were once awakened to the consciousness of their state, the marrow of their bones would melt, and their heart would dissolve like wax in the midst of their bowels. They are asleep, indifferent and unconscious. Do what you may to them; let every thing be swept away that is hopeful, that might give them cheer when they come to die, yet they feel it not; for how should a sleeper feel anything? But, "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober."

Inactivity in Sleep

Now, I come to give another meaning to the word "sleep." I hope there have been some of my congregation who have been tolerable easy whilst I have described the first three things, because they have thought that they were exempt in those matters. But sleep signifies also inactivity. The farmer can not plow his field in his sleep, neither can he cast the grain into the furrows, nor watch the clouds, nor reap his harvest. The sailor can not reef his sail, nor direct his ship across the ocean, whilst he slumbereth. It is not possible that on the Exchange, or the mart, or in the house of business, men should transact their affairs with their eyes fast closed in slumber. It would be a singular thing to see a nation of sleepers; for they would be a nation of idle men. They must all starve; they would produce no wealth from the soil; they would have nothing for their backs, nought for clothing and nought for food. But how many we have in the world that are inactive through sleep! Yes, I say inactive. I mean by that, that they are active enough in one direction, but they are inactive in the right. Oh how many men there are that are totally inactive in anything that is for God's glory, or for the welfare of their fellow creatures! For themselves, they can "rise up early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness;"—for their children, which is an alias for themselves, they can toil until their fingers ache—they can weary themselves until their eyes are red in their sockets, till the brain whirls, and they can do no more. But for God they can do nothing. Some say they have no time, others frankly confess that they have no will: for God's church they would not spend an hour, whilst for this world's pleasure they could lay out a month. For the poor they can not spend their time and attention. They may haply have time to spare for themselves and for their own amusement; but for holy works, for deeds of charity, and for pious acts they declare they have no leisure; whereas, the fact is, they have no will.

Professing Inactive Christians

Behold ye, how many professing Christians there are that are asleep in this sense! They are inactive. Sinners are dying in the street by hundreds; men are sinking into the flames of eternal wrath, but they fold their arms, they pity the poor perishing sinner, but they do nothing to show that their pity is real. They go to their places of worship; they occupy their well-cushioned easy pew; they wish the minister to feed them every Sabbath; but there is never a child taught in the Sunday-school by them; there is never a tract distributed at the poor man's house; there is never a deed done which might be the means of saving souls. We call them good men; some of them we even elect to the office of deacons; and no doubt good men they are; they are as good as Anthony meant to say that Brutus was honorable, when he said, "So are we all, all honorable men." So are we all, all good, if they be good. But these are good, and in some sense—good for nothing; for they just sit and eat the bread, but they do not plow the field; they drink the wine, but they will not raise the vine that doth produce it. They think that they are to live unto themselves, forgetting that "no man liveth unto himself, and no man dieth unto himself." Oh, what a vast amount of sleeping we have in all our churches and chapels; for truly if our

churches were once awake, so far as material is concerned, there are enough converted men and women, and there is enough talent with them, and enough money with them, and enough time with them, God granting the abundance of His Holy Spirit, which he would be sure to do if they were all zealous—there is enough to preach the gospel in every corner of the earth. The church does not need to stop for want of instruments, or for want of agencies; we have everything now except the will; we have all that we may expect to give for the conversion of the world, except just a heart for the work, and the Spirit of God poured out into our midst. Oh! brethren, "let us not sleep as do others." You will find the "others" in the church and in the world: "the refuse" of both are sound asleep.

Be Sober

Oh! I might especially urge this precept upon you at this time, my dear friends. We have hard times coming, and the times are hard enough now. Let us be sober. The fearful panic in America has mainly risen from disobedience to this command—"Be sober;" and if the professors of America had obeyed this commandment, and had been sober, the panic might at any rate have been mitigated, if not totally avoided. Now, in a little time, you who have any money laid by will be rushing to the bank to have it drawn out, because you fear that the bank is tottering. You will not be sober enough to have a little trust in your fellow-men, and help them through their difficulty, and so be a blessing to the commonwealth. And you who think there is anything to be got by lending your money at usury will not be content with lending what you have, but you will be extorting and squeezing your poor debtors, that you may get the more to lend. Men are seldom content to get rich slowly, but he that hasteth to be rich shall not be innocent. Take care, my brethren—if any hard times should come, if commercial houses should smash, and banks be broken—take care to be sober. There is nothing will get us over a panic so well as every one of us trying to keep our spirits up—just rising in the morning and saying; "Times are very hard, and to-day I may lose my all; but fretting will not help it; so just let me set a bold heart against hard sorrow, and go to my business. The wheels of trade may stop; I bless God, my treasure is in heaven; I can not be bankrupt. I have set my affections on the things of God; I can not lose those things. There is my jewel; there is my heart!" Why, if all men could do that, it would tend to create public confidence; but the cause of the great ruin of many men is the covetousness of all men, and the fear of some. If we could all go through the world with confidence, and with boldness, and with courage, there is nothing in the world that could avert the shock so well. Come, I suppose, the shock must; and there are many men now present, who are very respectable, who may expect to be beggars ere long. Your business is, so to put your trust in Jehovah that you may be able to say, "Though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will I not fear;" and doing that, you will be creating more probabilities for the avoidance of your own destruction than by any other means which the wisdom of man can dictate to you. Let us not be intemperate in business, as are others; but let us awake. "Let us not sleep"—not be carried away by the somnambulism of the world, for what it is better than that?—activity and greed in sleep; "but let us watch and be sober." Oh, Holy Spirit, help us to watch and be sober.

Children Of The Day

And now, if you look to the text again, you will find there another argument. "Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love." So, then, it seems, it is war-time; and therefore, again, it is unseemly to slumber. There is a fortress, yonder, far away in India. A troop of those abominable Sepoys have surrounded it. Blood thirsty hell-hounds, if they once gain admission, they will rend the mother and her children, and cut the strong man in pieces. They are at the gates: their cannon are loaded, their bayonets thirst for blood, and their swords are hungry to slay. Go through the fortress, and the people are all asleep. There is the warder on the tower, nodding on his bayonet. There is the captain in his tent, with his pen in his hand, and his dispatches before him, asleep at the table. There are soldiers lying down in their tents, ready for the war, but all slumbering. There is not a man to be seen keeping watch; there is not a sentry there. All are asleep. Why, my friends, you would say, "Whatever is the matter here? What can it be? Has some great wizard been waving his wand, and put a spell upon them all? Or are they all mad? Have their minds fled? Sure, to be asleep in wartime is indeed outrageous. Here! take down that trumpet; go close up to the captain's ear, and blow a blast, and see if it does not awake him in a moment. Just take away that bayonet from the soldier that is asleep on the walls, and give him a sharp prick with it, and see if he does not awake." But surely, surely, nobody can have patience with people asleep, when the enemy surround the walls and are thundering at the gates.

Now, Christians, this is your case. Your life is a life of warfare; the world, the flesh, and the devil; that hellish trinity, and your poor flesh is a wretched mudwork behind which to be intrenched. Are you asleep? Asleep, when Satan has fire-balls of lust to hurl into the windows of your eyes—when he has arrows of temptation to shoot into your heart—when he has snares into which to trap your feet? Asleep, when he has undermined your very existence, and when he is about to apply the match with which to destroy you, unless sovereign

grace prevents? Oh! sleep not, soldier of the cross! To sleep in war-time is utterly inconsistent. Great Spirit of God forbid that we should slumber.

Bring Out Your Dead!

But now, leaving the chapter itself, I will give you one or two other reasons that will, I trust, move Christian people to awake out of their sleep. "Bring out your dead! Bring out your dead! Bring out your dead!" Then comes the ringing of a bell. What is this? Here is a door marked with a great white cross. Lord, have mercy upon us! All the houses down that street seem to be marked with that white death cross. What is this? Here is the grass growing in the streets; here are Cornhill and Cheapside deserted; no one is found treading the solitary pavement there is not a sound to be heard but those horse-hoofs like the hoofs of death's pale horse upon the stones, the ringing of that bell that sounds the death-knell to many, and the rumbling of the wheels of that cart, and the dreadful cry, "Bring out your dead! Bring out your dead! Bring out your dead!" Do you see that house? A physician lives there. He is a man who has great skill, and God has lent him wisdom. But a little while ago, whilst in his study, God was pleased to guide his mind, and he discovered the secret of the plague. He was plague-smitten himself, and ready to die; but he lifted the blessed phial to his lips, and he drank a draught and cured himself.

Can You Imagine It?

Do you believe what I am about to tell you? Can you imagine it? That man has the prescription that will heal all these people; he has it in his pocket. He has the medicine which, if once distributed in those streets, would make the sick rejoice, and put that dead man's bell away. And he is asleep! he is asleep! He is asleep! O ye heavens! why do ye not fall and crush the wretch? O earth! how couldst thou bear this demon upon thy bosom? Why not swallow him up quick? He has the medicine; he is too lazy to go and tell forth the remedy. He has the cure, and is too idle to go out and administer it to the sick and the dying! No, my friends, such an inhuman wretch could not exist! But I can see him here to-day. There are you! You know the world is sick with the plague of sin, and you yourself have been cured by the remedy which has been provided.

The Precious Gospel

There is the precious gospel; you do not go and put it to the lips of a sinner. There is the all-precious blood of Christ; you never go to tell the dying what they must do to be saved. The world is perishing with worse than plague: and you are idle! And you are a minister of the gospel; and you have taken that holy office upon yourself; and you are content to preach twice on a Sunday, and once on a weekday, and there is no remonstrance within you. You never desire to attract the multitudes to hear you preach; you had rather keep your empty benches, and study propriety, than you would once, at the risk of appearing over-zealous, draw the multitude and preach the word to them. You are a writer; you have great power in writing; you devote your talents alone to light literature, or to the production of other things which may furnish amusement, but which can not benefit the soul. You know the truth, but you do not tell it out. The death-bell is ringing even now; hell is crying out, howling with hunger for the souls of men. "Bring out the sinner! Bring out the sinner! Bring out the sinner! Let him die and be damned!" And there are you, professing to be a Christian, and doing nothing which might make you the instrument of saving souls—never putting out your hand to be the means in the hand of the Lord, of plucking sinners as brands from the burning! Oh! May the blessing of God rest on you, to turn you from such an evil way, that you may not sleep as do others, but may watch and be sober. The world's eminent danger demands that we should be active and not be slumbering.

Where Are You?

Hark how the mast creaks! See the sails there, rent to ribbons. Breakers ahead! She will be on the rocks directly. Where is the captain? Where is the boatswain? Where are the sailors? Ahoy there! Where are you? Here's a storm come on. Where are you? You are down in the cabin. And there is the captain in a soft sweet slumber. There is the man at the wheel, as sound asleep as ever he can be; and there are all the sailors in their hammocks. What! and the breakers ahead? What! the lives of two hundred passengers in danger, and here are these brutes asleep? Kick them out. What is the good of letting such men as these be sailors, in such a time as this especially? Why, out with you! If you had gone to sleep in fine weather we might have forgiven you. Up with you, captain! What have you been at? Are you mad? But hark! the ship has struck; she will be down in a moment. Now you will work, will you? Now you will work, when it is of no use, and when the shrieks of drowning women shall toll you into hell for your most accursed negligence, in not having taken care of them. Well, that is very much like a great many of us, in these times too.

This proud ship of our commonwealth is reeling in a storm of sin; the very mast of this great nation is creaking under the hurricane of vice that sweeps across the noble vessel; every timber is strained, and God help the good ship, or alas! none can save her. And who are her captain and her sailors, but ministers of God, the professors of religion? These are they to whom God gives grace to steer the ship. "Ye are the salt of the earth;" ye preserve and keep it alive, O children of God. Are ye asleep in the storm? Are ye slumbering now? If there were no dens of vice, if there were no harlots, if there were no houses of profanity, if there were no murders and no crimes, oh! ye that are the salt of the earth, ye might sleep; but to-day the sin of London crieth in the ears of God. This behemoth city is covered with crime, and God is vexed with her. And are we asleep, doing nothing? Then God forgive us! But sure of all the sins he ever doth forgive, this is the greatest, the sin of slumbering when a world is damning—the sin of being idle when Satan is busy, devouring the souls of men. "Brethren, let us not sleep" in such times as these; for if we do, a curse must fall upon us, horrible to bear.

You Can Not Serve God By Proxy

Ah! sirs, but you can not serve God by proxy; what the minister does is nought to you; you have your own personal duty to do, and God has given you a precious promise. It is now on your heart. Will you not turn round to your next neighbor, and tell him that promise? O! there is many an aching heart that aches because of our idleness in telling the good news of this salvation. "Yes," says one of my members, who always comes to this place on a Sunday, and looks out for young men and young women whom he has seen in tears the Sunday before, and who brings many into the church, "yes, I could tell you a story. He looks a young man in the face, and says, 'Haven't I seen you here a great many times?' " "Yes." "I think you take a deep interest in the service, do you not?" "Yes, I do: what makes you ask me that question?" "Because I looked at your face last Sunday, and I thought there was something at work with you." "O! sir," he says, "nobody has spoken to me ever since I have been here till now, and I want to say a word to you. When I was at home with my mother, I used to think I had some idea of religion; but I came away, and was bound apprentice with an ungodly lot of youths, and have done everything I ought not to have done. And now, sir, I begin to weep, I begin to repent. I wish to God that I knew how I might be saved! I hear the word preached, sir, but I want something spoken personally to me by somebody." And he turns round; he takes him by the hand and says, "My dear young brother, I am so glad I spoke to you; it makes my poor old heart rejoice to think that the Lord is doing something here still. Now, do not be cast down; for you know, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.'" The young man puts his handkerchief to his eyes, and after a minute, he says, "I wish you would let me call and see you, sir." "O! you may," he says. He talks with him, he leads him onward, and at last by God's grace the happy youth comes forward and declares what God has done for his soul, and owes his salvation as much to the humble instrumentality of the man that helped him as he could do to the preaching of the minister. Beloved brethren, the bridegroom cometh! Awake! Awake! The earth must soon be dissolved, and the heavens must melt! Awake! Awake! O Holy Spirit arouse us all, and keep us awake.

Unconverted Sinner

And now I have no time for the last point. My fellow sinner, thou that art this day unconverted, let me say six or seven sentences to thee, and thou shalt depart. Unconverted man! unconverted woman! you are asleep today, as they that sleep on the top of the mast in time of storm; you are asleep, as he that sleeps when the water-floods are out, and when his house is undermined, and being carried down the stream far out to sea; you are asleep, as he who in the upper chamber, when his house is burning and his own locks are singeing in the fire, knows not the devastation around him; you are asleep—asleep as he that lies upon the edge of a precipice, with death and destruction beneath him. One single start in his sleep would send him over, but he knows it not. Thou art asleep this day; and the place where thou sleepest has so frail a support that when once it breaks thou shalt fall into hell: and if thou wakest not till then, what a waking it will be! "In hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment;" and he cried for a drop of water, but it was denied him. "He that believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ, and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." This is the gospel. Believe ye in Jesus, and ye shall "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." 

  C.H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) - One of the most famous pulpit preachers in England in the 1800's. Known as the 'prince of preachers' till this day. His books and sermons are still in circulation today.