

AN INDICTMENT OF THE CHURCH FOR BEING ASLEEP

Ephesians 5:25-27—Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such things; but that she would be holy and blameless.

Revelation 19:6b-7—Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.

Revelation 22:17—The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come, let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.

Our Lord, we come to You this morning, thirsty to know more of Thee. We come here to hear and to be able to respond from our hearts: Come, Lord Jesus. And we come even into this larger dimension which is Your church destined to be Your bride. We want to learn how to find ourselves in a single voice with the Holy Spirit who is interceding for us deeply within and saying "Come." Lord, bring us to this place of preparedness. We know not exactly what needs to be done by way of righteousness and deeds. Perhaps it is only a turn of attitude and then You will come. Do instruct us and give us understanding of Your way and will in these last days. We pray that You will have mercy and grace upon us. In Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen.

We know we are near the end of time and history as we know it. There is very much going on in our present world that shows there is a tremendous shaking of kingdoms going on all about us. And we see, as we have studied in the book of Revelation, that this shaking is not something that is happening because of the sinfulness of the nations, as much as that is true. But the shakings are actually a result of One who cannot be seen, but who, nevertheless, is in heaven holding a scroll and loosening seals, and with every loosening there is something shaken here upon this earth. There is a process of destiny which will bring this earth into a millennial reign and through tremendous fire and heat be transformed into eternity, and this course is unstoppable. We are part of a great mystery because the Lord is preparing His church, as we read in Ephesians 5, in order to present the church to Himself in all her glory. So in one sense the Lord is sitting on His throne in the heavens and yet in a mysterious sense He is down here with hands on washing, smoothing and working out the wrinkles by the precious Holy Spirit. The Spirit has been assigned by the King to get the bride ready. Now we know that our Lord said, "What He begins He finishes. The Alpha is the Omega.

The Lord Is Preparing a Bride

In one sense we gain great assurance from this fact. The Lord will finish and prepare a glorious bride. We see in heaven how they are rejoicing because finally the wedding is come and there is a bride for this Groom. What a heart He has had all along. We remember in John 17

that His prayer actually had a lot to do with this: "Oh Lord, would you make them one and sanctify them by Your Word so that I might share My glory with them and they with Me, and all could see My presence in them, I in them, Thou in Me." The Lord has this so much on His heart when we see these things.

Nevertheless, there is a place for us and some work for us to do. The very statement, "The bride has made herself ready," implies that we have cooperated in this sanctifying process. So it is not for us to sort of lay back and say, "Okay, Lord, do Your work;" but we are to be exercised in our will. And it is not only in these matters of personal sanctification but in a transformation of character so that when the bride says along with the Holy Spirit, "Come," the bride will not look ugly; she will have the character of Christ. And the mystery must further be stated that since the day of Pentecost when the Spirit was sent upon this earth to do this finishing work, in some sense, the bride and the Spirit have been saying, "come" for a long time now. There are many saints who have been sanctified and prepared by God who have gone into glory in the presence of the Lord. How wonderful!

We understand from this verse that there must be a representation of this bride of sufficient character and maturity upon this earth so that it can join with the Spirit and say, "Come." Our Lord Jesus Christ wants to come to this earth, so the saints in heaven are not praying, "Come to heaven" because they are already in His presence. On the other hand, we realize that those in heaven clearly see that our Lord's design is for a kingdom on earth. However, somebody on earth needs to say, "Lord, come here," and the Lord wants this united voice. The Holy Spirit has been whispering this and shouting it since He came down at Pentecost, and there must be those people so united in that Spirit, so full of that Spirit, that this is their major cry.

Is the Church Ready for the Coming of the Lord Jesus?

That is why when we look around us, we have to say, "Is the church ready?" Do we hear those cries? And we have to respond. There are places on earth where people are ready, and there are people to whom this is their lone cry. I have noticed as I have traveled around and ministered in various places that where I hear this cry from the church, "Come, Lord Jesus" the loudest comes from places where the saints have little hope. They do not have much prospect for the future. They do not have much income, they do not have a free society, they cannot get ahead, and they cannot chase after all the things the Americans do. Some of them are under intense persecution, even hated by their countries for what they believe, and they have only one prospect. Some of them are in jail because they had a Bible and got caught, and they have a cry: "Oh, Jesus, come. That is our only hope of glory. We are not going to get it by changing the administration of the United States government. Our only hope is that You will come."

So perhaps we ought to pray that we will fall into the darkness of an evil nation and Babylon will be our citizenship, and we will be under such intense persecution that that is all we have left to do. Maybe we will have some part of a Bible that we have torn out and hidden in our pants, and we read it and cry, "Lord Jesus, come;" and we have nothing else to look forward to. But the Lord wants to do something that brings a greater glory to Him. He wants to find a people who are so blessed and have received so much that that stuff does not even affect them anymore because they have found the pearl of greatest worth. They know who their real

treasure is and whether they have a million dollars or ten thousand dollars in the bank, they know who their treasure is and they are crying, "Come, Lord Jesus." This world really needs the Lord Jesus to come back. There is just something missing no matter how happy your life is if you will spiritually realize it.

So here we are in the process. The Lord is gathering some people and He has gathered us as part of that cleansing and preparing work of our Lord Jesus who is preparing His bride even while we have been gathered together this week. And He wants to wash us with the water of the Word and so strike our hearts that we would cry out with a renewed anointing of the Holy Spirit, "Oh, Lord Jesus, come."

I am talking about the bride; therefore, I need to talk about the church on a wide basis. I know that there are some of you here who are almost perfect and ready to be raptured; there are some here just getting started, and maybe by the grace of God this message will get out in different places for the rest of the church to hear; therefore we need to talk to the church as a whole because the church is those blood-bought children of God who have been saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We see a strange mystery that is commented upon in the Bible very clearly—its problem and its remedy. So if I could put it simply, I want to indict the church for its being asleep and command it to repent.

Isaiah's Commissioning

The church is asleep, and the Lord says, "Wake up." It is interesting when you look in the Scriptures how much of our understanding and prophetic warning comes to us as Christians from the state of Israel in its various stages. Just as an example, let us look at Isaiah, our gospel prophet, who received his call in chapter 6. After Isaiah falls before the Lord his commissioning comes when he hears: "Whom shall I send? And who shall go with Me?" And Isaiah said, "Here am I, send me."

Listen to this commission that the Lord Jehovah, the enthroned Lord over Isaiah, says to him: "Go, and tell this people: keep on listening, but do not perceive (this is a description of being asleep), keep on looking, but do not understand. Render the hearts of this people [fat], their ears [heavy], their eyes dim (smeared over literally), otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed." Turn, repent and be healed.

Israel's Problem of Being Asleep

But Israel has come to this strange position of sleep. Now this sleep involves a spiritual blindness, but it is not that kind of total blindness which you would immediately seek remedy for. This is a kind of smearing cataracts. You have probably known someone who has had a cataract operation, and I always say to them: "How did it go?" And they say, "I cannot believe I see colors. I used to see people walking as trees, now I see them clearly. I did not know how blind I was until these cataracts were lifted from my eyes."

Israel had cataracts. They saw the Lord but they did not see the Lord. They read the Word, but did they hear the Word? Maybe they heard, but did they heed? And if we, in our spiritual

response, do not go through that full cycle of reading, hearing, responding, keeping, treasuring, and doing, there is a deafness that comes in.

One time a Pentecostal church in Brooklyn asked me to come and speak to the kids. They had one hundred and fifty kids, and they arranged for a place in the country to send them and asked me to go and speak to them. When I got up to speak, they were so obnoxious, so unruly, and carrying on in spite of the leaders trying to quiet them down. I spoke for ten minutes and closed my Bible and went back to the cabin. The leaders came to find out what I was doing, and I said, "I am not speaking to them." Then they began to say: "The problem is they hear about repentance, about discipleship, and about committing their lives, and they are gospel hardened. They have heard it so much their ears have been hardened to it."

Our ears get heavy. There was nobody better about reading the Word than the Jews; they were better than you and I are. In the days of Isaiah they were reading the Word and having it read to them. They read and read and read; they had their daily devotionals, but there was something missing about getting it out of the box into the heart because the heart was asleep. And when they heard a word, their response would be: "Yes, that is a good word. I have to take notes on it or I will forget it." And they take notes on it and put the notebook away and forget about it. This spiritual blindness is a strange disease. And with spiritual deafness you do not know you are deaf because you are hearing.

One time I foolishly plunged into the deep water in some paradisiacal spot in Hawaii and came up with my ears full of water, and suddenly my wife sounded strange. I heard my wife but could not understand her. That is the first time I can actually claim spousal deafness. I could not understand; my ears were full of water.

Jesus Used Parables to Awaken People

This was the situation in Israel. Of course you say, "Well, you see they are Old Testament people. For goodness sake, you and I are Christians; we do not forget the Word of God. We do not see and not see and hear and not hear." It is interesting that Jesus quoted this exact passage when He was explaining why He had to use parables. Jesus said, "You know why I am using parables? It is because if I start speaking about the kingdom of God, your ears close up and your eyes smear over. So I have to catch them off guard by giving another parable. He was trying to get them to see these precious things that we are so familiar with and breed contempt in us."

While Jesus was here on earth He gave many warnings about how we need to stay awake and watch and pray. We can see in the New Testament that the church has the same problem. It gets so bad that even in II Peter 3 there were believers who were scoffing at the second coming of the Lord. Believers! Now there are many Christian groups that do not believe in the second coming of the Lord. What they really say is that the second coming of the Lord happened with Pentecost, but Jesus is not coming back to earth. There are many Christians who believe that. So they never attend a conference such as this one or they do one session and that's all, because they do not believe it.

Do you believe in the four-square gospel? A. B. Simpson came up with that term before the Pentecostals grabbed it. He said, "We have to preach Jesus as Savior, Jesus as Sanctifier, Jesus as Healer, and Jesus is coming again. And many people said, "What! Coming again!" A. B.

Simpson was a Presbyterian, and they do not talk about those kind of things. But A. B. Simpson did and he started New York City rocking and rolling in the early twentieth century because he preached the four-fold gospel. Jesus is coming again, but scoffers, even in the church, are saying, "What is this about? Ever since the beginning they have been saying He is coming, but everything is still the same." However, this is a progression of history to be climaxed when Jesus comes again. Everybody here who is smart knows everything that ever happened is going to happen again. Ecclesiastes told us so. And yes, he told us that when he was spiritually blind. All he saw were things under the sun where everything goes around and around. So we have Christian scoffers who, when you talk about the second coming, say, "Right!"

The Remedy for Sleepiness

Here is the key. Our only remedy for sleepiness is by repentance and the only way we will come to repentance is if the voice of God can speak to us and awaken us. Have you ever tried to wake a sleeping Christian? They usually just roll over on your shoulder and start snoring louder. It is only the voice of God that can awaken the church to its true state.

There are two things that are spoken about in the book of Revelation and are foundational to the church's understanding. John was on the Isle of Patmos because of "the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus, and the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy."

Our faith is built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ and our understanding of the objective reality of our faith is based upon the Word of God. We do not have any hope of being awake unless our foundation is upon the Word of God. But the unique thing that happened on the day of Pentecost is that the church was also given a spirit of wisdom and revelation because our spirits were quickened. In the old dispensation there would be a prophet here and perhaps a prophetess there who would receive prophetic understanding as well as the Word of God. In other words, they could spiritually interpret what God was saying. That was the Old Testament. Now on the day of Pentecost your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your maidservants, and old people will dream dreams with a spiritual interpretation.

Christians are Given the Capacity to Know the Spiritual State of Things By the Spirit

You and I were born of the Spirit and that means we were born with a capacity to see things unseen, to understand and discern things that are going on in the world. Jesus spoke and said to the Jews of His day: "You are able to see the signs in the sky and understand the weather but you have no spiritual interpretation." But then He said to His disciples in Matthew 24 as He talks about that tree and its spiritual importance: "Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door" (v. 32-33).

Just as an example: "When you see the fig tree ripen ..." and we know that in 1948 suddenly that fig tree sprung to life. Now the church, the disciples of Jesus, should have the spiritual discernment to hear and sense that that means the Messiah is right here at the door. He is right here coming through this door; He is almost here. Is that what you sense? Has it

altered your whole life? The church can only be prepared if it not only has the Word of God as its foundation but a spirit of revelation through whom they can see Christ and what He is doing.

Do we have this kind of spiritual capacity? How can we hold the testimony of Jesus if we do not understand spiritually what is going on? How can we be ready if we do not understand the spiritual state of things?

The Thessalonian Church Knew About the Second Coming of Christ

When we look in the New Testament, we find this spiritual sleep is not some strange unknown doctrine. Let's look at a few references so we can settle this in our heart because this is a major problem. I Thessalonians is perhaps Paul's earliest letter that he wrote and he is speaking to these Thessalonians with whom he had only been able to stay for two or three weeks before he was chased away. But in that two or three weeks he had established them in the gospel, filled them with the Holy Spirit and told them the details of the second coming. It is really incredible, but it is because when they got saved, they met together and said, "Let's have a meeting this morning." "Good, okay." "What are we going to do now?" "Let's have lunch and have a meeting in the afternoon." "Okay, great." "What do we do now?" "Let's have dinner and a meeting tonight." When Paul was in town, it was three meetings a day because there was such a hunger for the Lord. They were together with Paul for only a few weeks and already knew about the second coming, the antichrist and all these things. Isn't that amazing!

Paul tells this young church: "Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. (You already know these things; you are spiritually sensitive.) For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night" (I Thessalonians 5:1-2). We have just heard these things this week, but these Christians heard them three, four weeks into their salvation. "While they are saying, 'Peace and safety! Then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief, for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober" (vv. 3-6). The time is near. These were young Christians.

Paul Shared the Whole Counsel of God with the Roman Church

Then later on Paul wrote to the Romans whom he had never met at the point he wrote the letter to them. Usually, when you are writing to somebody whom you have never met you do not want to say anything that is going to turn them off too much. But no, Paul shares the whole counsel of God with them. We get to the end of chapter 13:11 and see this exhortation straight forward as if this were commonly understood by all Christians. There is a problem with the church falling asleep.

"Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we [first] believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity

and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (vv. 11-14).

Living in the Flesh Will Lull Us to Sleep

Let’s take at least one lesson out of that passage. Our flesh is what makes us go to sleep. The disciples ashamedly said to Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane: “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.” Our flesh is heavy stuff. When somebody lives in the flesh, they have a lot of baggage. The things of our flesh cause us to be heavy. When you live out of your soul-life, and even some people serve the Lord out of their soul-life, they are totally exhausted. They fall asleep. If Christians do not learn how to live out of the resurrection life of Christ, if they have not died so that Christ can live in them, they are in danger of falling asleep. Oftentimes the first thing you say to Christians is: “How are you doing?” “Oh, I am exhausted.” Well, you have too much flesh. You are accumulating too much stuff. You have too many attitudes, too many likes and dislikes, too many of this, too many of that. The complexity of carnality exhausts you in your Christian life, and many Christians fall asleep out of living like that.

Make no provision for the flesh. That is in connection with this matter of waking up. If there is something making you tired and exhausted check it out. It may not be something the Lord has commanded but something that you are doing for your own self-fulfillment and it is making you nice and sleepy.

The Ephesian Church Had a Spirit of Prophecy

In Ephesians, chapter 5, Paul talks to this church that was not only built upon the Word of God and the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, but they were built with a spiritual sensitivity. Their church was born in the midst of spiritual conflict. They were born in the midst of magicians and books of astrology and things that had to be burned for the Christians to go forward in the Lord. They were born under the principality of Artemis, who was not just a god of the Persians, but a principality that had its spiritual impact of oppression over that whole area of Asia Minor. And the church was born despite spiritual opposition because these people had spiritual insight. They had a spirit of prophecy. They understood the times and they understood things of the spirit. And it is to this very church that he says very practically: “For this reason it says, ‘Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:14).

Paul is talking to Christians when he tells them to wake up. I know a lot of preachers like to use this in gospel preaching, but you are actually calling people to arise from the dead when you are preaching the gospel. Unfortunately, with Christians they came to life and now have fallen asleep. And in chapter 5, just preceding these verses, Paul is talking about the darkness of this world we live in. However, we are not to walk as children of darkness but as children of light, and to live as children of light, and even to prove the deeds of darkness. We are living in a

dark world, and you know what darkness makes us want to do? Fall asleep. It is so easy to sleep in a far corner of the auditorium. We just put on some sun glasses and it just seems like it is late at night. Oh, how easy to fall asleep! “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh.” There has to be some counter-action or sleepiness is guaranteed. As well-intended Christians, unless we are doing those things that enable us to walk in the light and in the day we will fall asleep. When we fall asleep, the enemy has won a partial victory because you are one of God’s children and you are useless.

The Strategy of the Enemy

The enemy has a strategy, and we should not be ignorant of his schemes. The enemy wants to fill your suitcases with so many things that you no longer have time to serve the Lord. Jesus said, “I am come that you might have life and have it abundantly,” but He said it in this context: “The devil has come to steal, kill and destroy you.” He will say, “Here take this, take that, put this in your suitcase. Add this to your baggage.”

Yesterday, my wife and I did this walk around the upstairs gym track, and you could not help but hear noise coming from the kids watching the World Cup game. So I went over to watch and, of course, I had to stand up because all the kids were taking the seats. So much for respect. As I looked closely I noticed something; there were four boys sitting on the main sofa right in front of the television with the soccer game going on, and all four of them had devices they were looking at and had ear plugs in. The kids have so many things now that they do not have time to pray; such as face book, twitter and other devices. If you can obtain these toys you will be out of the loop for spiritual things because it will take up your time.

One brother told me there were two great days in his life—the day he finally got the money to buy a boat and the day he sold the boat. “I have to have a boat, or I have this girlfriend I have to spend a lot of time with.” I wonder if it is worth it in the end. There is going to be an accounting for all the things we do, all the time we spend doing.

Redeem the Time

In Ephesians Paul puts it in this wonderful way, and I am prophetically interpreting some things here. We need to redeem the time. Now that means you have to buy it back because the world has got your time. Thank God, there are some of you who have been working for forty years or more and are to the place where you can work as much or as little as you want to. For most of you though the world has got your time. You are on the world’s clock. There are some people here who are having to call in every time the meeting is over and find out what is going on and do some extra work at night. The world has got your clock. You have to do this and do that; the school says you have to these things with your children; your clock is completely filled up. Unless you buy back time for the Lord, it is all gone. Redeeming the time costs something because you are buying it back. The devil stole it and you need to buy it back. Otherwise, you will never be prepared; you will be asleep.

Unconfessed Sin Will Cause One to Sleep

And then many people are asleep because they are living in the shadow of unconfessed sin. You just will not admit that thing is a sin; therefore, the blood of Jesus will not be applied to it and you live in a kind of spiritual shadow. Until you confess and get it right you are wasting time, marking time in the shadows. And Jesus brings to light one of the simplest and most profound problems among Christians and that is unforgiveness. It puts you right in the shadows. How can the Lord answer your prayers if you cannot forgive your brother? It takes you right out of life.

Delayed Obedience

And something even more subtle is delayed obedience. "I will get around to it;" these are intentions that never materialize. Isn't it interesting that the children of Israel decided to go in and take the Promised Land the day after the Lord said it was too late. When the Lord said, "Go," they said, "No." And the Lord said, "You cannot go." Then they said, "Now we are going." There are many brothers who are now in your midlife and God has a calling on your life for perfection and to fellowship in the bride, and you have delayed it and not been faithful. You stalled on the calling of God and it has put you in some kind of a slumber where you can actually sit in an assembly and not feel that you have any obligation to live by the life of the Lord among God's people in the assembly. Brothers, awake! So you are in your second million, are you? Is that making you happy? that you are in bondage to the world and have to bow down to Babylon? Is that making you happy? The Lord does not tell you to quit your job; He tells you to be His disciple. He does not tell you not to go to school, nor to pursue a vocation, nor forget about getting married. In the midst of all that, seek the kingdom of God first and His righteousness and all these other things get added. As soon as they get put in some kind of a spot where it starts delaying obedience we are in serious trouble.

What is the Lord's remedy to sleep? I speak as a fool, but somehow the voice of God has to shout to wake us up and we see it put in these simple terms: repent. If we are talking about the church being ready to express with the Spirit, "Come, Lord Jesus," we are talking about churches in the book of Revelation where five out of seven were told to repent. Awaken from sleep. Even though people are very busy they are sleep walking.

John the Baptist Calls for Repentance

What does it mean to be asleep? All of you know that our primary example of the need for repentance came at that juncture in history where John the Baptist was raised up to prepare the way for the Messiah to come. Now there was a problem. Israel was completely unprepared for the Messiah. How do I know that? Because when Jesus came, most of them looked at Him eyeball to eyeball and could not see He was the Messiah. That means they lacked spiritual preparation. When John was sent, which was before Jesus came, and this was God's mercy, this is what he said: "The kingdom of God is upon us and we are not ready. You are naked; you are full of sin, you are not ready for the Messiah. Repent, come into these waters, prepare your hearts or there is One coming right around the corner and I am not even worthy to untie His shoe laces. But He is coming and you better be ready for Him, for He is going to sift out the

wheat and chaff.” He was talking about Jesus. And how close was Jesus to coming around the corner? Six months at the most.

John came and this is how God finally awakened the church. God sent a voice: “John, are you a prophet?” He said, “I am a voice.” Let’s be more specific: he was *the* voice predicted in Isaiah 40—one crying in the wilderness. But when he spoke, it was God’s voice speaking through him and mercifully a large number of people woke up. It was a shock to their Jewish system. These people actually woke up when they heard God’s voice. After four hundred years of prophetic silence, even though God spoke to individuals, it was four hundred years of prophetic silence to Israel and suddenly *boom*, it was like a thundercloud. John said, “The kingdom is here,” and people found themselves immediately unprepared.

Now up to that point John spoke to the people especially in Judea and those who hung around Jerusalem who were religious people, professional religious people, full time amateur religious people, people that go to this conference and that conference. All of those people thought they were ready; that is spiritual sleep. They said, “What are you talking about? I gave sacrifices, I just spent twenty-nine dollars on a lamb without blemish. We ate the way we were supposed to eat, we prayed the way we were supposed to pray, went to the temple, listened, joined in worship, went back home, did all the things we were supposed to do, such as putting the Scriptures on our heads and arms. I am ready. Oh, we want the Messiah to come. We want Him to throw down the Roman government. We want the Messiah to come, we are ready for Him.” And their spirit was completely unready. They just thought they had to do some more religious stuff and the Messiah would come. They were praying for the Messiah to come just to knock off Rome and set Israel free at last.

Who Was Ready for the Messiah When He came?

Then the Messiah comes. Who was ready for Him? John and Andrew—who were they? Little Johnny fisher boy and Andrew, Peter’s brother, and the only thing they had going for them was when they heard John the Baptist, their hearts were done in. They were crushed and went into the waters and were baptized. They were hanging around John when Jesus came and John said, “Behold the Lamb of God,” and John and Andrew left John the Baptist and followed Jesus because they saw who He was. They woke up and they followed the Messiah. And there were others who woke up as well. Thank God.

Jesus gathered some disciples to Himself, and they were people who woke up. The Bridegroom is saying, “Behold, I come quickly.” That is the divine voice from heaven for His church, and we do not hear it. I suppose we are very satisfied with this world when you get right down to it, and we are also unprepared for His coming. Our King is so great, but actually to tell you the truth I do not know how I could work this out doctrinally. Even if the Lord Jesus wanted to come for His bride, in her present state our Father would disallow it because it would be an insult to our King. Our King is so worthy; He is so glorious, so full of love, so longsuffering. He has been waiting for such a long time, but He will not come to a babe; heaven insists He come to a bride. This bride’s voice has to be changed from babyhood into a single cry of an adult mature, Christ-like vessel who can say, “Come.” And the church is not at that point.

Actually, when some people hear that Jesus is coming soon, and I hear Christians say this: “Oh Jesus, don’t come, don’t come,” as if this is some kind of thing He wants to hear. “I am not

ready, my family is not ready. No, no please, I am not ready.” Better you speak against yourself and say, “I am not ready, and I may not be in that wife, but Lord Jesus come.” We have such selfish hearts. The fact of the matter is He can only come to a bride who has first love. He can only hear the voice of somebody saying, “Come,” who is showing in their life He is their special treasure. And if He is not those things to us we are not really there yet.

Do We Desire His Coming?

Do we believe in His coming? Second question: Do you desire His coming? Don’t give me a religious answer. Do you desire His coming? Even if it is against yourself, even if it means you do not get married, even if it means you do not get that bonus, even if it means you never fulfill your life’s dream, may you seek the kingdom of heaven in such a way that His coming will be your life’s dream. Are you prepared for His coming? Church, are you prepared for His coming? I do not think there is any of us who are prepared to say, “Yes I am prepared.” So I am going to ask you another question. This is not a loop hole, but it is a reality. If you cannot say you are prepared for His coming, can you say right now you are preparing for His coming? I believe in the end that the moment He comes there will be Christians of maturity and Christians newly born but the fact of the matter is they will all be preparing, growing, spiritually increasing, finding a fuller possession of Christ in their lives, allowing the Spirit and the work of the cross to build something. They are in a preparation stage and I am not talking about some automatic thing that you just take in by osmosis. Are you preparing for the coming of the Lord? Then repent.

When God’s People Awaken it Reveals Their True Condition

I want to mention two things about awakening. First, repentance is awakening. That is what repentance really is. It is a whole new process that has come because you have been awakened out of your sleep. There are two things that happen at the same time when somebody is awakened out of a spiritual sleep, but they bring us immediately into a place of preparing. What are those two things that happen when we repent? Of course, it is by the sovereign majesty of God that He awakens us. We cannot awaken ourselves. “Dana, wake up, wake up.” I have seen sisters punching brothers trying to wake them up. Usually it is all in vain. We speak the Word of God to one another, but unless the Holy Spirit speaks into your heart you will not wake up. You will remain in spiritual sleep, eyes all greased over, ears too heavy to hear, hearts that are dull as a stone, but if the Spirit speaks to you and you awaken, you will not be the same.

Two things happen in an awakening. One is that you immediately become aware of your real spiritual condition. It is an undoing to be awakened. It is also true that you become aware of the real spiritual condition of your surroundings. We will use once again Isaiah. When the Lord opened up the heavens and he saw Jehovah sitting on the throne, he said, “Woe is me, I am undone; I am a man of unclean lips.” That was his first response. But he could also see in that same moment of clarity: “and I live among a people of unclean lips.” It happened all in a moment, and he was undone.

I will put to you something that I cannot prove right now but I do believe it. Before Jesus came and stood in the midst of the seven churches in the book of Revelation none of them had any idea they were anything other than fully prepared. That is just the way we are. We deceive ourselves in our sleepiness and we do not see our real condition.

In Revelation 3 the Lord Jesus, the glorious High Priest is examining the lampstand in Sardis and He says, "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead (that is Jesus talking). Wake up (and that is Jesus talking).'" To a church by the end of the first century—not a church in the twenty-first century—He says, "Wake up and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. I Jesus stand in the midst and say, "Wake up!"

The Lord Jesus Stands in the Midst of the Assembly

I know that probably all of you have studied these seven churches and have seen what the Lord commends and what He rebukes, but what I am asking is that you and I might see with eyes of the spirit the Lord Jesus standing in the midst of your assembly. Now that is our only hope. Have you ever seen the Lord Jesus standing in the midst of your assembly? And what does He say about it? Have you ever heard Jesus speaking in the midst of your assembly saying, "This I commend you for, this I rebuke; repent and do that"? Now I know He wants to stand in the midst of every assembly. But I also can assure you that we are so asleep that we think we are okay, especially if we look around at one of the destitute assemblies. "Well, we are a lot better than that." When the Lord Jesus comes into your midst, there is only one church with which you have to do; it is the assembly you are in. Are you asleep? Is your assembly asleep?

Imagine Jesus saying, "Wake up!" "What do you mean wake up? We were just praising Your name." He says, "Wake up." What do you mean? He said, "I commanded you to do things; you got half way through them and you did not finish them." Do you think that is pleasing to My God? Is that a testimony? You fell asleep. "Strengthen the things that remain because you had a reputation that you were a living church but you are dead to Me." And He is talking about them awaking spiritually.

In the church of Laodicea, which has been mentioned so many times, we hesitate to even mention it; but just imagine this church. Once again do I have to argue the case that Laodicea thought they were a pretty good church? Outside the door could be the sign: PRETTY GOOD CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP. This is such a serious matter because it applies to most of the church today in this age of Laodicea, and the Lord comes in and says, "I am ready to spit you out. You are so displeasing to me, half-heartedness, praise with one hand up in the air, prayer with one eye open looking at your watch. You are so self-sufficient, having all the money you need. You have your preachers, your Sunday school system, everything so nice, all set up just the way you like it, and you are getting pretty particular about the way you like it. If someone says something a little different from what you like, you say, "Yeah, that guy." But the Lord comes and says, "You are poor and wretched and blind and naked." How can He come for the church of Laodicea? "I am asking you to get some eye salve to get that grease off your eyeballs, and buy some gold instead of the junk that you carry around thinking it is valuable. Wash your robes, be sure they are white, with no stain, no sin. Wake up."

Notice what He does say at the end in verse 19 and this is the longsuffering of our Lord Jesus: “Those whom I love I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.” I do not know how big the church at Laodicea was or how many members it had, but I am so happy to say that when the Spirit spoke to her, there were some who heard and repented and will be able to sit on the throne of God even as Jesus overcame.

Seeing Our True Condition—Seeing the Sovereign God

When we talk about the great awakenings which have happened in church history we often think of the ingathering of souls that were saved during those times. But that was actually the after effect of the church repenting and coming back to what the Lord wanted. When the church in Wales repented and came back to their spiritual condition that the Lord desired for them, people got saved as fast as they came and heard the testimonies. If the Lord can find a church that is truly awake and living and serving and doing what He wants and loving Him and waiting for Him, the Lord can do magnificent things through such a church. But the first thing is to see our true condition. At the same moment we see our spiritual condition we also see the sovereign God alive standing over us ready to bring us into His preparation work. You see your state and then you see a Lord who sovereignly has a plan all ready for you to make it.

Isaiah Sees the Plan of God

As an example, we see Isaiah who fell apart and said, “Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips,” and then he said, “Lord, send me.” He saw that there was a plan and there was something he could do about it. He had been trusting in King Uzziah, the kingdom of Judah, but when he saw who was the real King of Israel it changed his whole life. He died trying to serve the king of Judah and he lived to serve Jehovah sitting on the throne. He said, “Jehovah, what do You want me to do?” Forget being a prophet for Judah, I want to be Your prophet. What do You want me to do?”

Isaiah Preaches to the Stump

Then God said this: “Preach to the stump. Go ahead and prophesy to the people who will not listen. Talk to people who will not hear, to people whose hearts are dead. I want you to go and preach the truth because there is a stump, a remnant that is alive and can bear seed and grow. So go and speak to the remnant” (see Isaiah 6:13). And we know that is what he saw. That is the way forward. The first thing he did was have a child and called him Shear-jashub, “a remnant shall return.” He found a way. He spoke to them all but they would not listen; however, there was a stump that was listening. “All right, stump, let’s get together and pray.” There was the remnant. Isaiah gave us more insight into what the remnant was like than any other prophet in the Old Testament. That was the Lord’s way forward.

The Lord came and by His Spirit He stood in front of all seven churches and said this: "I see, and this is what you must repent of." And then He says, "Okay, who can hear me? Who is hearing me?" And many people did not hear Him obviously, but those who did hear, heard and heeded and repented. And they found themselves in a renewed life, gathered with some other ones who loved the Lord so much, and they overcame. All of the currents were working against them, but they overcame and they added to their prayer: "Oh Messiah, come, come." Now when the Lord reveals the devastation around you, He also reveals that He has a plan forward.

Daniel's prayer in chapter 9 is one of the great confessional prayers that was prayed on behalf of all Israel who were in captivity. Why did Daniel pray that prayer? What gave him the forward impulse of the spirit to pray that particular prayer about them going back to Jerusalem? It is because someone gave him a scroll of Jeremiah and he realized that it was only seventy years before God had a plan, a prosperity, a hope and a destiny for the Jewish Nation, and Daniel started praying because he saw that God would move them back to Jerusalem to build the house of God. You see there is a plan forward.

Notice that in all of the seven churches and the five where He commands them to repent He always adds, "and do this." So to Ephesus He says, "Remember from where you have fallen and repent; do the deeds you did at first." That did not change what deeds were done as much as it was the fullness of Christ expressed in those deeds out of first love. So for each of the churches called to repent it was a way forward: "Do this, keep this." Wonderful Lord!

The Enlightened People Who Have Fallen Back

Is it worth your waking up to discover the living God in our midst? We have a particular problem. What do you do with people who were once awakened and now have cataracts again? This is the greatest complicated thing in the Bible. It is one thing to be a Christian in the church and you are awakened to see that you are asleep and not prepared. But it is another thing to have that awakening twenty or thirty years ago and now find cataracts settling in again. What do you do? The two most difficult books that I know to expound in the Bible are Malachi and Hebrews. Both of them speak to people who once were enlightened and now are fallen back asleep.

Malachi's Message to the Rebellious Children of God

What do you do with Malachi? Who is Malachi writing to? He is writing to a remnant who sacrificed all, came back from Babylon, built the city of God, the temple and now it is a hundred years later; and it is the grandkids of the remnant who were faithful. The Lord comes to them and says, "I have loved you," and they said, "How have You loved us?" God says, "You have robbed Me; and they said, "How have we robbed You?" God says, "I am weary of your complaints." "How have we wearied You?" This is the attitude of modern Christians. The Lord says, "I want you to come and follow Me, prepare yourself for My coming." But we say, "What am I going to do? Haven't I done it already? Haven't I done enough?" "You are offering blemished sacrifices." "What do You mean by blind sacrifices?"

When you read the book of Malachi, you see the churlish, rebellious state of God's children, except at the end when you see some people who fear the Lord and they listen and

are talking to one another, and they are praying. The Bible says, "From heaven God looks down and sees that remnant and writes their name in the book." Now that is what you do with people who grow cataracts again. When you remind them to repent, they get churlish and say, "What do I need to do? Haven't I done enough? I served You for forty years; isn't it time I retired and sit back?" That is their argument, but the Lord will win that argument if you fall before Him.

I know these are heavy words. I am sorry to be one who brings in such a strong word, but if we do not hear the Spirit calling us to repent there is no hope in this generation. If we do not hear the Lord telling us, "You are doing something wrong and you are on the wrong track and I want to talk to you about it, but you will not even listen to Me; you do not even realize that you need repentance. Repentance is an awakening. If we see the real condition of the church, then we will not go around blaming other people because we have seen our spiritual condition and a whole congregation who have learned our habits and are just as bad.

An Attitude Change

Oh, leaders, if you do not see, your people will never see. If we are too busy trying to perpetuate our own situation then may the Lord have mercy on us. Now He is looking for a bride who can join in one voice with the Spirit and say, "Oh Jesus, come." But the bride has got to wake up. Just as those virgins had to wake up at the coming of the Bridegroom, it is time to wake up and be prepared. And who knows, maybe just the awakening, the change in attitude, the repentant heart, seeing your unworthiness and seeing that you are not ready and repenting of that which He shows in the light and asking the Lord to be in the midst is what it will take. Maybe an attitude change is all that is necessary for the Lord to say, "Now I am ready and I will come." I am not sure how many more works and things need to be done or how many more people need to be saved. I do not know these great mysteries, but I know in the twinkling of an eye the Lord can come if our attitude can just be broken in repentance and we cry out to the Lord and see Him in the midst moving, doing something, already doing something in your life. Maybe if you have been awakened and you have seen your condition and you have seen the Lord, He is already doing something in your life. You are under repair already. You are preparing.

Now I hope that everybody here is already awake and truly has a heart of repentance, but I share these things because there might be someone who has been asleep and it is time to wake up. Salvation is nearer than when we first believed. Don't get so many trinkets or be involved in the world or in darkness or caught up in the flesh or any of those kind of things that would hinder you in any way from being prepared for what is about to happen. May the Lord help us in these days.

Lord, do have mercy on us. And Lord, I do not speak as one who is self-righteous, but as one who needs to be wakened. Lord, we don't want to be in a sleepy state. Oh Lord, open our eyes by the Holy Spirit and cause us to be those who are first in line to say: "Woe is me." Unless the Lord does a work among us we will not be ready. Oh Lord, have mercy upon us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

