

Wilbur and his wife, Leah, attended every Sunday morning. Wilbur was a farmer, and whenever he came into the house from the field and sat down, he would fall asleep. It was such a habit that when he came into church and sat in the pew, he would also fall asleep. I discovered that some of the members of the church were taking bets to see how long I could keep Wilbur awake on Sunday mornings.

Wilbur's wife was embarrassed by his behavior, especially when he began to snore. She tried everything to keep her sleepy spouse awake. She complained to him that she was getting calluses on her elbow from poking him in the ribs in a futile attempt to keep him alert. One day, while shopping in the grocery store, she saw a small package of Limburger cheese. Leah bought it, and dropped it in her purse.

The next Sunday morning, just after the sermon started, Wilbur began to nod off. Before long, Wilbur began to snore. That's when Leah quietly opened her purse, took out the Limburger cheese, and held it under her husband's nose.

It worked. Wilbur sat up straight and, in a voice that could be heard all over the sanctuary, said, "Leah, will you please keep your feet on your own side of the bed!" -- William Webber

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If all the people who go to sleep in church were laid end to end they would be a lot more comfortable.

Just before she dismissed the children to go to the worship service, a Sunday school teacher lectured them about being quiet in church. Then she asked, "Why is it necessary to be quiet in church?" Little Johnny jumped up and yelled, "Because people are sleeping!"

A man sobering up from the night before is sitting through the Sunday sermon, finding it long and boring. Still feeling hung over and tired, he finally nods off. The preacher, noticing his apparent hangover, had been watching him all along, and is disgusted. At the end of the sermon, the preacher decides to make an example of him. So he said, "All those wishing to have a place in heaven, please stand." The whole room stands up except, of course, the sleeping man. The preacher asks the people to take their seat. Then in a gradual crescendo, the preacher said, "And those who would like to find a place in hell, PLEASE STAND UP!" The weary man, catching only the last part, groggily stands up, only to find that he's the only one standing. Confused and embarrassed he says, "I don't know what we're voting on here, preacher, but it looks like you and I are the only ones standing up for it!"

In a church bulletin: Mrs. Jones remains in the hospital and needs blood donors for more transfusions. She is also having trouble sleeping and requests tapes of the preacher's sermons.

An exhausted-looking man dragged himself into the doctor's office. "Doctor, there are dogs all over my neighborhood. They bark all day and all night, and I can't get a wink of sleep."

"I have good news for you," the doctor answered, rummaging through a drawer full of sample medications. "Here are some new sleeping pills that work like a dream. A few of these, and your trouble will be over."

"Great," the man answered, "I'll try anything."

A week later, the man returned, looking worse than ever. "Doc, your plan is no good. I'm more tired than before!"

"I don't understand how that could be," said the doctor, shaking his head. "Those are the strongest pills on the market!"

"That may be true," answered the man wearily, "but I'm up all night chasing those dogs, and when I finally catch one, I'm lucky if I can get him to swallow the pill!"

The preacher noticed that during the sermon one of the men in the congregation got up and walked out. The preacher spoke to the man's partner after the service and asked if the sermon had something in it that offended the man. "Oh no," was the response. "He frequently walks in his sleep."

Today's text is taken from a letter to a sleeping church. You will be struck not only by the candor of the letter's content, but also the love that prompted it.

Alarms are, well . . . alarming. When we are sleeping, we do not usually welcome alarms. The alarm clock is not a welcome friend in the early morning. But a fire alarm, while even more unnerving, is something for which we are grateful!

Today's text sounds an alarm. Our first response may be that of resentment or rejection. But when a true friend sounds the alarm, we must give grateful attention. The same is true today when a shepherd keeping watch over our soul (an elder) sounds an alarm. It is an expression of his loving concern for us.

THE SLEEPING CHURCH

Rev 3:1-3

"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. '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. 'So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. NASU

Here is a stinging rebuke of a church that had a good reputation. They had the reputation of being a church that was alive. But the Lord says, in effect, "I know better." He said, "I know your works." It isn't our reputation among other people that matters. It isn't what we think of our congregation, either. What really matters is what the Lord thinks, because He sees beneath the surface.

There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Heb 4:13 NASU

This church looked good to everyone but the Lord. He said, "You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead." In other words, they were living outside the will of God. One look at the withered fig tree on the outskirts of Jerusalem displays very vividly the Lord's disapproval and condemnation of people who have merely an outward show of life but who are producing no fruit.

To this church the Lord exclaims, "Wake up!" Wake up to your unfinished business! Wake up to your neglect! Wake up to your carelessness! Wake up to your contentment with mediocrity!

This instruction was very appropriate for the church at Sardis, for there were two occasions when their negligence resulted in defeat at the hands of enemy forces. The city was situated at the top of a cliff, which appeared to be impregnable. Since they didn't think an enemy could scale the cliff, they left that side of the city unguarded. What seemed to be their most secure position turned out on two occasions to be their most vulnerable, due completely to their failure to keep watch.

Many have dozed off into the same spiritual slumber by simply laying down on the road to maturity. Like the church in Sardis, many have quit before they arrived at the destination. They have made a good start only to stall out. Perhaps they have grown discouraged or disillusioned. Maybe they feel defeated. It would be easy to feel sorry for those people; to comfort them and facilitate a gradual and easy revitalization program. But that is not the tact taken by the Lord. He doesn't softly call their name or gently nudge them back to consciousness. No! He exclaims, "Wake up!" It's more like pouring a cup of cold water in their sleep-matted eyes. Or overturning their bed. Or giving them a swift kick in their get-up-and-go.

If the Lord were to speak to this congregation today, I wonder if His voice would thunder the same wake up call. I don't claim to know the judgments of the Lord perfectly, but I am called by Him to exhort in sound words and to put in order His church.

There are those sitting in this auditorium right now who have, for various reasons, grown discouraged. These reasons may seem valid to you. And the fact is, I may sympathize with you and understand completely why you are discouraged. But this isn't about you and it isn't about me. It's about the Lord and His enterprise on this earth called the church. There's no time to sit around at our little pity party sipping on cups of self-pity and despair. If your ears are tuned to the voice of God, you can hear Him exclaiming, "Wake up!" Stop drowning in discouragement. Get up and get back to doing the work to which you were called.

Others are slumbering in the downy bed of disillusionment. This is a soft bed because you can blame your funk on someone who failed you. Maybe it was another Christian who didn't fulfill your expectations of what being a Christian is supposed to be. This is first of all a response of pride that assumes that any of us has lived up to the ideal. If I wanted to lay down on this bed of disillusionment, I'd have plenty of excuses to do so, for every one of us has let someone down. This is also a response of selfishness, for it exhibits our focus on self instead of upon Christ, Who is faithful to His promises and His nature.

Still others are lying down and asleep, failing to complete what they started, because they feel defeated. Again, it would be easy to sit down and cry with these people. But that isn't the word of the Lord. He says, "Wake up!" Don't start the battle and lay down your arms when it looks like victory is impossible. This is the time to fight with even more determination!

Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war with the cross of Jesus going on before!
Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe. Forward into battle, see His banner go!
At the sign of triumph Satan's host doth flee; On, then, Christian soldiers, on to victory!
Hell's foundations quiver at the shout of praise. Brothers, lift your voices, loud your anthems raise!

Encamped along the hills of light ye Christian soldiers, rise,
And press the battle ere the night shall veil the glowing skies.
Against the foe in vales below let all our strength be hurled;
Faith is the victory, we know, that overcomes the world.
On every hand the foe we find drawn up in dread array;
Let tents of ease be left behind, and onward to the fray.
Salvation's helmet on each head, with truth all girt about
The earth shall tremble 'neath our tread, and echo with our shout.

This is no time to sulk, but to shout!

Conclusion

"Sleeping With the Enemy" is a Joseph Ruben thriller from 1991 starring Julia Roberts, who plays the part of an abused wife at the mercy of a psychopathic husband who is both oppressive and sadistic. To escape, she fakes her death by drowning and reestablishes her life under a different identity in Iowa. But her husband learns of the plot and hunts her down.

Now the point we want to make is not that we are to live in terror as the evil one hunts us down. To the contrary, we have been made more than conquerors through Him who loves us (Rom. 8:37). What we are saying is that too many of us have grown so content sleeping with the enemy that we are apparently unaware of the dangers, much more making a concerted effort to escape.

We need a true friend to wake us up to the danger and help us escape.
Watch!

Leave no unguarded place, no weakness of the soul.
Take every virtue, every grace, and fortify the whole.
From strength to strength go on, wrestle and fight and pray.
Tread all the pow'rs of darkness down, and win the well-fought day.

-- George J. Elvey

We need to be a true friend who will boldly sound the wake up call for those who are drowsily descending into destruction. Dare we – can we – *sleep in heavenly peace* when there are souls around us who are asleep to their eternal demise?

Eph 5:14

"Awake, sleeper,
And arise from the dead,
And Christ will shine on you." NASU

False security

Mark 13:32-37

32 "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. 34 It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

35 "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back-whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'" (NIV)