

**Sermon preached by Mr. John S. Green,
at Gower Street Memorial Chapel, London,
on Sunday morning, 3rd February 1957.**

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**"I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of
my Beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me,
my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for
my head is filled with dew, and my locks with
the drops of the night.**

**I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I
have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?"**

Song of Solomon 5 : 2,3.

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This is a very solemn text indeed, and it shows to us the sad state into which God's church can get. It shows us also the sad state into which the individual believer may get.

What changes God's dear people are subjected to: I have looked at the last verse in the preceding chapter, and how in that verse the church appeared most healthy, and she said, "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my Beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits." There seemed such an intense longing for the dear Lord Jesus Christ, such a pleading for His blessed and sacred presence.

And then in the first verse of this fifth chapter, the Lord answers that prayer, and He says, "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice," and so on. But a sad change had come over the church, the bride of Christ. Instead of being graciously anxious for His presence and for that blessed communion with Him, she had fallen into a sad, sleepy state and

condition. Solemn to get there! A mercy to tremble at the very thought of getting into this state and condition! There is nothing I fear more, my dear friends, than being found where the church was found at this time. I know the painful, solemn experience of it. I could not stand here and say I have always been healthy in the things of God, always with my eye upon the 3rd of Colossians, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." Ah, we come painfully and sadly short at times.

We read in the 25th of Matthew of those ten virgins; five were wise and five were foolish, but whilst the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept - the wise as well as the foolish. Slumbered and slept - got into a sad, unexercised state and condition. The midnight was getting near, but they were all asleep. And that just shows apart from the gracious, enlivening influence of the Holy Spirit, it just shows apart from His rich, sanctifying grace, where you and I may get to.

A person who is asleep is unconscious of what is going on around him. A thief may be in his room and robbing him, and he be unaware of it. And there is not a shadow of doubt but what if you and I are left to get into this sleepy state, the devil will know it. He will come into our hearts as that thief and that robber, and he will spoil us. And it may be we shall have to go in that state and condition of being robbed and spoiled for many a day, for many a year. So the things of God are very solemn. "God is not mocked." No, we shall not fool God. A solemn consideration, that! "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." If those of us who fear God sow to our own flesh, there will be a sad reaping day for us before we die. There will indeed! And so the wise virgins - they slept as well as the foolish.

And then God spoke very solemnly to one church in the 3rd of Revelation. She had fallen into this sleepy state and condition. And God said, "Because thou art ... neither cold nor hot I will spue thee out of My mouth." Terrible words! Words, I hope, that have made some of us tremble. "I would that thou wert either hot or cold." If anything God abhors and hates, it is that lukewarmness in religion. And I am sure that the majority are in this state and condition in the day in which we live. O, I have felt this last day or two as this word

has laid upon my heart, "O that God would give me grace to pray that I may not fall asleep; that God will keep me spiritually awake." If the watchman goes to sleep, then the people are not warned, and the people may go to sleep too. It is not always the comfortable sermon or, as some people say, the nice sermons, that are the most profitable. Not by any means! I believe some of those sermons that have turned me inside out and searched me to the very marrow, have been some of the most profitable.

I believe some of you - I know you do - try to pray for me, pray that I may be kept spiritually awake. And if the watchman is awake, he will sound a note of warning - and woe unto those that disregard it! Woe unto those that find a thousand excuses! Ah, sinner, you and I will very soon be where there will be no excuses. No! You will have no excuses you can make in hell if you are lost. None whatsoever. We could find, perhaps, many an excuse today. I daresay a good many have their excuses why they are not at chapel: not very well; some, perhaps, genuinely so. But some, if we could look right into their heart, we should find the first two words of my text to be sadly true, "I sleep." A spiritual slumber has come over them; there is not that gracious, healthy, lively exercise.

As I meditated a little upon this text, I thought it will not be true of some of you who are coming towards the end of your life. When perhaps your poor body becomes so enfeebled that you cannot get to God's house, you will not look back and say, "There were Sabbaths when I could have gone, but I gave way to the old flesh." You will not have that regret. No. Through God's mercy, through His love to you in keeping you exercised, and in giving you much spiritual hunger and thirst, he has brought you to His sanctuary. Maybe times when this has been difficult; hard to get the poor old body to the chapel, yet you have been so hungry and so thirsty. A friend said to me once, and I have never forgotten it, I would not give much for the religion of 'oncens'; those who are satisfied with coming once on the Sabbath won't get to heaven, unless grace makes a change in them. What a solemn consideration! If they have no love to meet with God's people in His sanctuary on earth, how could they meet in heaven to worship God and to be with His people for ever and ever? A solemn thing indeed it is to be left to our poor old flesh, to live in that sleepy state and condition in which thousands are found!

"I sleep." Is that true of you, this morning, poor sinner? Are you asleep? Do you give way to the old flesh? It is so easy to give way to it. There are two kinds of sleepy people set forth in the Scriptures; those who are in that awful sleep of death, who have never been awakened from it by the blessed Holy Spirit; and those of God's dear people who have left their first love, who have for the time being forsaken the fountain of living waters. A person asleep is not hungry, is not thirsty. Those who are awake feel hunger and thirst. And so spiritually. You are no help to the minister, you are no help to the church of Christ, if you are asleep. No. But if God has mercifully and graciously awakened you, then you will feel in your hearts that hunger, that inward thirst for the water of life, and you will come up to the sanctuary longing and begging that God will give you something. And He will not pass you by.

If God in His love and mercy thus makes you spiritually awake, spiritually hungry and thirsty, He will give you a little. I believe I have got a little this morning from the first hymn our dear friend gave out at the Prayer Meeting (1036). I said, "Lord, that is just what I want, how I feel; anxious to know my sins forgiven, to find an open way to heaven." I felt that summed up the inward exercise of my soul as I contemplated this subject. You may say, "Well, surely, man, you don't stand up in the pulpit and say that you want your pardon?" I know when I first had it. I can look back to that time, but I cannot live on that. If *you* can, then you are in a sad, sleepy state and condition. If the dear Lord favoured you a few years back and you received a little help by the way, and you don't want anything today, you are in an awful, sad state, a most unhealthy, deathly state and condition. I can walk, I can get along with those poor sinners who, like the good hymnwriter, say:

"Daily I'd repent of sin,
Daily wash in Calvary's blood,
Daily feel thy peace within,
Daily I'd commune with God." (990)

O, I do want a daily, an hourly religion. Do you? The good hymnwriter said:

Whene'er becalmed I lie,
And storms forbear to toss;

Be thou, dear Lord, still nigh,
Lest I should suffer loss;
For more the treacherous calm I dread,
Than tempests bursting o'er my head. (294)

I had rather be tossed about by devils and the corruptions of my own heart, than to be left to that careless, prayerless state and condition.

So when we come to examine the state and condition of the church in my text, we find she was in a sad and solemn condition. And it may be, sinner, that is where you are this morning. You sleep. I believe there are two particular occasions in the life of a child of God when he needs to fear this. The first is after he has been blessed; after he has been favoured with the pardon of his sins; when perhaps the Lord has dandled him upon the knees, when he is spiritually happy, spiritually contented; perhaps comes before the church in the sweet warmth of that love - and that is the time to come. That is the time to come. But that is the time when the old enemy gets to work, and he may say, "Well, you will get to heaven. Look what great things the Lord has done for you. Look how He has favoured you." And in that subtle way he tackles that child of God, and that child of God attempts to rest, not in that blessed Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, but in his experience, short of Christ, and before one is aware, they are asleep. They grow unexercised; they grow careless; they become indifferent; there is not that pleading with God in prayer. An awful state they are in, and not aware of it. O my friends, beware of this. Those of you who are younger: you may be delighting in God, but let me warn you how subtle Satan is.

The other state is towards the end of life. It is a grievous thing to come across some. They may tell us something of their early days, what good days they had, how the Lord blessed them and favoured them. But towards the end of their journey, what death seems to come. I knew one old friend - she could speak sometimes of her early days, but you know, when I sometimes got in her company towards the end of her life, what a change. Speak about the newspaper and one thing and the other, but one could not get her to speak anything upon the things of God. I used to leave her sometimes feeling sadly disappointed. Now, that is being in that sleepy state and condition - an unexercised, unhealthy state. May this be a word of warning to

some of you who are growing old, but who may be thus answering to the description set forth in the Scriptures: "Asleep." O that you may bring forth fruit in old age! O, to be kept spiritually alive, that we may still pray and still plead that God will bless us and bless His church!

"I sleep." The midnight call came, and the virgins were all asleep. But, you see, the wise had oil in their vessels with their lamps. The church in my text was not dead, for she said, "I sleep, but my heart waketh." She had a secret exercise right down in her heart. And I believe some of you know what it is to have that exercise - deep down in your heart you know things are not right; when you pray you know your prayers are not right; you know your hearing is not right. And there is a secret grief at the bottom of your heart. If this is so, then you are not a dead professor. You are not found among the foolish virgins if you know that exercise deep down in your heart, and amidst all the darkness you feel, and the sleepiness that you are in, - there is a secret pleading with God that He would purge you, that He would help you, though you wonder what the end of these things will be unless He visits your heart again.

So the church said, "I sleep, but my heart waketh." And God's dear people know from time to time what it is to feel something like this. You read God's Word, but you don't read it as you used to read it. You do not search it diligently as you used to search it. You read it to keep conscience a bit quiet; you read it merely for a duty. A sad state this is to get into, when there is no real hunger for the things of God. "I sleep, but my heart waketh."

We may look at this sleep in another way. We may be too taken up with the things of this poor, dying world. And it is very easy to slip into this state and condition, to fall asleep. Well, you may say, "My business increases. I must give more time to it. The Scriptures exhort me to be diligent in business." But it does not end there - "serving the Lord." And when we get into that sleepy condition, we just take those parts of God's Word that, as it were, suit our case. And can there be anything worse, anything more solemn than to be resting in this way on God's Word? Making the word fit our sleepy state and condition, as it were? And so we have been found in that sad state and condition, when the things of this world prosper, when

things have gone pretty well, and we find we must be taken up more, we must pay more diligence to the things of this life, and we let slide the things of God.

The enemy and our own hearts work together in this. I knew one good man, a very godly man, one I loved and esteemed for the truth's sake, but God permitted him to get on remarkably well in business. And this good man and his wife were at it until the clock struck 12 on a Saturday night, and then they packed up. And what happened on the Sunday? They were too tired to listen to the minister preach. Yes, too tired. And not only were they spiritually asleep, but literally asleep as well. O what a grief, what a sad example to the flock when such is the state and condition. And that was not the end of it. He got more sleepy, and at last had no time to go out to the mid-week service. "We must get everything settled up," he said. And so he left the week evening service. I felt, solemnly felt, "God will deal with you, my friend. He will deal solemnly with you." And He did. Very, very solemnly! One day God struck him down, and they had to call the doctor quickly. The doctor said, "If you put your foot to the ground, you will die immediately." "Ah, but, doctor," he said, "look at my business" - not God's house. That was not considered; it was his business. But the doctor again warned him that he would drop dead if he put his foot out of bed. And there he had to lie. And there God solemnly taught him, and God weaned him on that bed from the things of this poor, dying world. That is what He will do with us if we get into that state and condition. My friends, God will not leave us in this sad, sleepy state and condition. He will do something; and whatever He does will be very painful for your poor nature, very crucifying to your nature, but it will be in the end for your soul's good. And He will bring you out of that terrible sleep. He will exercise you again unto prayer. The church was exercised afterwards, and she said, "I opened to my Beloved, but He had withdrawn." Difficulties had come, things had gone wrong, and now she wanted Him; but before she had slighted Him. And so it may be with us. May God give us grace that we may be kept spiritually awake.

Another thing that may bring you into this sleepy state and condition - if you get like Martha. Martha was not lazy, you know. I know these earthly things must be attended to; I have proved that for many

years. But the Lord said to her very kindly and graciously - and there was also a loving rebuke in it - Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. You are getting too over-anxious, Martha. You are cumbered about much serving. This will not be for your soul's good. It will bring death into your soul, Martha. And so He kindly and graciously rebuked her. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." I believe Martha would take the word of rebuke. "Thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her."

Now when the Lord thus rebukes His dear people and brings them out from that state and condition, what a mercy! But if we do not give heed to His word of rebuke, then we shall slip into this state where the church had slipped into in my text, and we shall fall asleep. These things of time and sense will so take up our time and our mind, that we shall have no time for the things of God. The Lord will watch, the Lord will see it, and He will say, I shall have to make time for that child of Mine to serve Me. I shall have to lay My hand upon him.

Then you look how one slights the Lord Jesus Christ when they get into that state and condition. The church said, "It is the voice of my Beloved that knocketh." She knew it was the voice of the Lord Jesus, and yet it did not move her. She had got into this sad, sleepy state and condition that even the voice of her Beloved that knocked did not move her. She did not want to be disturbed; she did not want to leave her bed; she plainly wanted to enjoy herself in her earthly comforts. And, poor sinner, is that where you are? With regard only for the poor, dying, foolish things of this life, and you know it is the Lord's voice? And yet you won't give way? But He will knock again. My dear friends, He won't leave you until He has brought you out of this sad state and condition.

But is it not a sad thing once to have been taken up with the dear Lord Jesus Christ, to have esteemed the word of His mouth more than our necessary food, and now not to be moved? Now, notwithstanding all his kindly, gracious pleadings with her, she will not move. But she will move soon. The Lord will see to it that she

will come out after Him. He will cause something to come up in her life, some affliction, to bring down her heart with sorrow, that she will have to fall down. O, poor sinner, you will want your Beloved then! You will search for Him then! But it may be that you will have to go through the trouble without Him as to His felt sacred presence. He will deny you that, and you will have to mourn that you have so slighted the tokens of His grace, that you have so grieved His blessed Spirit.

"I sleep, but my heart waketh; it is the voice of my Beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled." He goes on then to say, "For my head is filled with dew and my locks with the drops of the night." But no; at present nothing moves her! She is content to remain in that sad, solemn condition. But God will bring her forth - bring her forth lovingly and yet solemnly. As we read in another portion of God's Word, He will take all her lovers from her, deny her all her earthly comforts, and that is when He puts His hand in at the hole of the door. And then she awakes from her sleep, and as it says further down, she sought Him but she found Him not. We may very easily lose the felt presence of the Lord Jesus, but it may be many a day, many a month, or even many a year, before we are really and truly and sweetly brought back and favoured again to walk in the light of His countenance.

Well you may feel that these things have been very solemn. Perhaps some of you have said, "They don't apply to me; he has missed me this morning; I am all right; I am safe enough; I am contented enough; I have gone on in this way for years, and I trust I shall be all right in the end." Bunyan tells us that Ignorance was just like that. He thought he would be all right in the end, but he was not, you know. He was weighed in the balance in the end, and found wanting. And if you put these things from you and say they do not apply to you, you are like Ignorance, in that sad solemn state and condition. Better far for us, if the Lord is teaching us and blessing us, to lean hard upon that knife that sometimes seems to cut us to the very quick. Better far to be where the Psalmist was when he said, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me ... and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Amen.

[Reading: Malachi 1 & 2.]