

## Night of Weeping

*Why GOD's Children Suffer*

by Horatius Bonar

Copyright © 1845

### CHAPTER 10

#### THE AROUSING

IT MAY HAVE BEEN long since the HOLY SPIRIT awoke us from our sleep of death. Into that same deep sleep we know that we shall never fall again. He who awoke us will keep us awake until JESUS come. In that sense we shall sleep no more.

But still much of our drowsiness remains. We are not wholly awake, and oftentimes much of our former sleep returns. Dwelling on the world's enchanted ground, our eyes close, our senses are bewildered, our conscience loses its sensitiveness, and our faculties their energy; we fall asleep even upon our watchtower, forgetful that the night is far spent, and the day is at hand.

While thus asleep, or half-asleep, all goes wrong. Our movements are sluggish and lifeless. Our faith waxes feeble; our love is chilled; our zeal cools down. The freshness of other years is gone. Our boldness has forsaken us. Our schemes are carelessly devised and drowsily executed. The work of GOD is hindered by us instead of being helped forward. We are a drag upon it. We mar it.

But GOD will not have it so. Neither for His work's sake nor for His saints' sake can He suffer this to continue. We must be aroused at whatsoever cost. We are not to be allowed to sleep as do others. We must watch and be sober, for we are children of the light and of the day, not of the night nor of darkness.

GOD cannot permit us thus to waste life, as if its only use were to be sported with or trifled away. Duties lazily and lifelessly performed; halfhearted prayers; a deportment, blameless enough perhaps, but tame and unexpressive, and, therefore uninfluential; words well and wisely spoken perhaps but without weight - these are not things which GOD can tolerate in a saint.

It is either the coldness of Sardis to which He says, "**If thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.**" Or it is the lukewarmness of Laodicea to which He says, "**Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.**"

In arousing us GOD proceeds at first most gently. He touches us slightly, as the angel did Elijah under the juniper tree, that He may awaken us. He sends some slight visitation to shake us out of our security. He causes us to hear some distant noise: it may be the tumults of the nations, or it may be the tidings of famine, or war, or pestilence afar off. Perhaps this entirely fails; we slumber on as securely as ever.

Our life is as listless and as useless as ever. Then He comes nearer, and makes His voice to be heard in our own neighborhood or within the circle of our kindred. This also fails. Then He comes nearer still, for the time is hurrying on and the saint is still asleep. He speaks into our very ears. He smites upon some tender part till every fiber of our frame quivers and every pulse throbs quicker. Our very soul is stricken through as with a thousand arrows. Then we start up like one awakening out of a long sleep, and, looking round us, wonder how we could have slept so long.

But oh, how difficult it is to awaken us thoroughly! It needs stroke upon stroke in long succession to do this. For after every waking up there is the continual tendency to fall back again into slumber. So that we need both to be made awake and to be kept awake. What sorrows does our drowsiness cost us - what bleeding, broken hearts! The luxury of "**ease in Zion**" indulged in perhaps for years has been dearly bought.

"Think of living," was the pregnant maxim of the thoughtful German. "Thy life," says another, quoting the above, "wert thou the pitifulest of all the sons of earth is no idle dream, but a solemn reality. It is thy own. It is all thou hast to confront eternity with. Work then, like a star, unhasting yet unresting."

There are some Christians who work, but they do not work like men awake.

They move forward in a certain track of duty, but it is with weary footstep. Their motions are constrained and cold. They do many good things, devise many good schemes, say excellent things, but the vigorous pulse of warm life is wanting. Zeal, glowing zeal elastic and untiring - is not theirs. They neither burn themselves, no do they kindle others. There is nothing of the star about them save its coldness. They may expect some sharp stroke of chastisement, for they need it.

There are others who are only wakeful by fits and starts.

They cannot be safely counted on, for their fervor depends upon the humor of the moment. A naturally impulsive temperament, of which, perhaps, they are not sufficiently aware, and which they have not sought either to crucify or to regulate, renders them uncertain in all their movements. This intermittent wakefulness effects but little. They do and they undo. They build up and they pull down. They kindle and quench the flame alternately. There is nothing of the "star" about them. They stand in need of some sore and long continued pressure to equalize the variable, fitful movements of their spirit.

There are others who seem to be always wakeful, but then it is the wakefulness of bustle and restlessness. They cannot live but in the midst of stirring, and scheming, and moving to and fro. Their temperament is that nervous, tremulous, impatient kind that makes rest or retirement to be felt as restraint and pain.

These seldom effect much themselves, but they are often useful by their perpetual stir and friction for setting or keeping others in motion and preventing stagnation around them. But their incessant motion prevents their being filled with the needed grace.

Their continual contact with the outward things of religion hinders their inward growth and mars their spirituality. These are certainly in one sense like the star, wakeful and unresting, but they move forward with such haste that instead of gathering light or giving it forth, they are losing every day the little that they possessed.

A deep, sharp stroke will be needed for shaking off this false fervor and imparting the true calm wakefulness of spirit, to which, as saints, they are called. It is the deepening of spiritual feeling that is needed in their case, and it takes much chastening to accomplish this.

There are others who are always steadily at work and apparently with fervor too.

Yet a little intercourse with them shows that they are not truly awake. They work so much more than they pray that they soon become like vessels without oil. They are farther on than the last class, yet still they need arousing. They are like the star, both unresting and unceasing, yet their light is dim. Its reflection upon a dark world is faint and pale. It is a deeper spiritual life and experience that they need; and for this, it may be, there is some sore visitation in store for them.

The true wakeful life is different from all these. It is a thing of intensity and depth. It carries ever about with it the air of calm and restful dignity, of inward power and greatness. It is fervent, but not feverish; energetic, but not excited; speedy in its doings, but not hasty; prudent, but not timid or selfish; resolute and fearless, but not rash; unobtrusive and sometimes, it may be, silent, yet making all around to feel its influence; full of joy and peace, yet without parade or noise; overflowing in tenderness and love, yet at the same time, faithful and true.

This is the wakeful life! But oh, before it is thoroughly attained, how much are we sometimes called upon to suffer through the rebelliousness of a carnal nature that will not let us surrender ourselves up wholly to GOD, and present ourselves as living sacrifices, which is our reasonable service!

In thus arousing us from our slumber, chastisement not merely makes us more energetic, more laborious, but it makes us far more prayerful. Perhaps it is here that the waking up is most sensibly felt. Nothing so quickens prayer as trial. It sends us at once to our knees and shuts the door of our closet behind us. In the day of prosperity we have many comforts, many refuges to resort to; in the day of sorrow we have only one, and that is GOD. Our grief is too deep to tell to any other; it is too heavy for any other to soothe. Now we awake to prayer. It was something to us before, but now it is all. Man's arm fails, and there is none but GOD to lean upon.

Our closets, in truth, are the only places of light in a world which has now become doubly dark to us. All without and around is gloom. Clouds overshadow the whole region. Only the closet is bright and calm. How eagerly, how thankfully we betake ourselves to it now! We could spend our whole time in this happy island of light which GOD has provided for us in the midst of a stormy ocean.

When compelled at times to leave it, how gladly do we return to it! What peaceful hours of solitude we have there with GOD for our one companion! We can almost forget that the clouds of earth are still above us and its tempest still rioting around us.

Prayer becomes a far more real thing than ever. It is prized now as it was never prized before.

We cannot do without it. Of necessity, as well as of choice, we must pray, sending up our cries from the depths. It becomes a real asking, a real pleading. It is no form now.

What new life, new energy, new earnestness are poured into each petition! It is the heart that is now speaking, and the lips cannot find words wherewith to give utterance to its desires. The groanings that "**cannot be uttered**" are all that now burst forth and ascend up into the ear of GOD.

Formerly, there was often the lip without the heart; now it is far oftener the heart without the lip. Now we know how "**the Spirit helpeth our infirmities.**" We begin to feel what it is to "**pray in the Holy Ghost.**"

There is a new nearness to GOD. Communion with Him is far more of a conscious reality now. It is close dealing with a living, personal Jehovah. New arguments suggest themselves; new desires spring up; new wants disclose themselves. Our own emptiness and GOD's manifold fullness are brought before us so vividly that the longings of our inmost souls are kindled, and our heart crieth out for GOD, for the living GOD.

It was David's sorrows that quickened prayer in him.

It was in the belly of the whale that Jonah was taught to cry aloud.

It was among the thorns of the wilderness and the fetters of Babylon that Manasseh learned to pray.

Church of CHRIST - chosen heritage of the Lord - awake! Children of the light and of the day, arise! The long winter night is nearly over. The day-star is preparing to ascend. "**The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.**" (I Peter 4:7) "**Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation!**" (Luke 22:46)

~ end of chapter 10 ~

\*\*\*