

“AWAKE THOU THAT SLEEPEST”

(The discourse below by Pastor Russell given in Seattle, Washington, reported in the 1913 Convention Report, starting on page 139. We think the title given in the Convention Report was in error. Instead of the title being “ACTIVITY IN THE HARVEST” we think it should have been “AWAKE THOU THAT SLEEPEST.”)

Our text is found in the Apostle’s quotation from the Old Testament, “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” (Eph. 5:14) Our text may be applied to the world in general first. The world in general is asleep. In one sense of the word it is dead. The death sentence passed upon all. As we know, the whole world is said to be dead in trespasses and in sins, dead under Divine sentence. Our first parents having disobeyed God, we, being in their loins, shared with them the sentence that came upon them. But this death sentence that was passed upon all has been transmuted, or changed, by the Lord to be a sentence to sleep for a while and then to be awakened. God had this in His glorious purpose from before the foundation of the world; as the Bible tells us that Jesus in the divine program was the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world. God knew exactly what He intended to do. He intended to redeem the human family and, therefore, because He purposed this redemption and restitution by awakening from the sleep of death, He always speaks of this when speaking to those who know Him, those who believe Him, not as a death state, but as a sleep state; as, for instance, Abraham slept with his fathers. And just so our Lord Jesus called our attention to the fact that God said, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” God would not speak of Himself as being the God of anybody who was dead in the sense of being extinct, for whom there would be no future life. Therefore, Jesus, in reasoning out this subject with the Scribes, declared that this was proof of the resurrection of the dead. Not a proof that the dead were alive, nor that they did not need a resurrection, but a proof that the dead would rise because God said respecting these that He was still their God, thus recognizing them as still having some right in God’s great arrangement to a share in the future life by a resurrection secured through the redemption accomplished by our Lord Jesus’ death. So, then, in this text the Apostle is saying that those who are thus asleep, those who are thus with the dead world, should awake. “Awake, thou that sleepest in the dust”—rise up superior to the remainder of mankind, wake up, realize what and where you are. That brings to our attention that the majority of the human family seem to be passing through life in a kind of a maze; they are not awake; they seem to be going about as in a dream; they are not thinking of any of the important things of life, as a rule, but they are thinking of the trivialities of life, what they shall eat, what they shall drink, wherewithal they shall be clothed, where they are going to get some pleasure, who will entertain them—those are the trifling things the world thinks about, instead of thinking of the weighty things, the things that pertain to God, to the Divine will, to the future and everlasting life.

There is a picture that is known as the “Soul’s Awakening.” It represents a young girl sitting in meditation, with a book in her hand; she is bending her eyes and looking toward the Lord—into space. The thought that the picture gives to my mind, is that here is a young person who has been in the ordinary affairs of life hitherto, but now has seemed to get the eyes of understanding open, seemed to come out of the sleep, as it were, seemed to awaken. The body was awake before that, but now the soul is awake to think about God and the things of the future, about the meaning of the Word of God.

I presume that picture represents something in the experience of practically all who have come to the Lord. There has been an awakening of the soul first, and it is to this that the Scripture seemingly has an application, awake, thou that sleepest, arise now from the dead. What then? Christ shall give thee light. But we need to awake. And this is the first thought we should have in sympathy with those who are still away from the Lord, who have never yet heard the voice of the Lord. Blessed are your eyes for they have seen, and your ears for they have heard. Things come to us we did not think of before, we have had the soul awakening. We are thinking about what the Lord has to say to us.

You know some of the world have been steeped in sin and degradation, and living for the world merely, and never seem to think of anything at all; they heard and never paid heed; they heard about heaven, and about the Lord, yet it never seemed to go in. Then came a time when they somehow or other experienced a soul awakening; they realized they were sinners and there was a sentence against them. Perhaps they got the right view that the sentence was death, but more likely the wrong view that it would be torment. From the moment of awakening it means a crisis in their lives; how would they respond? Would they come near to God and get a blessing, or would they turn from God and wander off into greater darkness, greater sin, and be more difficult than ever to reach the message?

Perhaps in your case, as in mine, it was not a case of awakening out of a condition of sin, but we had been God’s people all our lives, had never known anything else. I am sure that is the case with a great many people who are of the Lord’s family; trained as Christian children, they never knew anything except the Bible, hymns and prayers; and yet the soul was not awake. It was going through the form of singing the hymns without really thinking of what the words meant. They were asleep—somnambulism, as it were, going around half stupid, not knowing what they did or said. I had my own experiences in that way. I remember very well the period of my soul awakening. It was when I was about 15 years of age, and I thought, as I look at that picture called “Soul’s Awakening,” that the young person in the picture looked to be about 15, and that gave me the thought that perhaps there were a great many of about that age when they reach thoughtful conditions. There seems to be a great change, you know, in human nature about that time, and it is a splendid time for the forces of spiritual growth to come toward these, and for parents and guardians to have in mind that it is a very favorable time for soul awakening. I do not mean to say that we should delay our endeavor to bring the child to

a knowledge of the Lord. Quite to the contrary, from the time the child is born it should always be trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We believe the training of the child should begin nine months before it is born, in order that the child may be properly born, in order that the parental mind may have the proper influence on that child. The best opportunity you will have in the whole experience, so that the proper thoughts of justice and love, and mercy, and kindness, and gentleness, and reverence toward God, may be impressed upon the child mind is prior to its birth. I have a good deal of confidence in that.

As I look about me in the world and see how farmers are careful of their stock, and how they try to get the best blends of nature, etc., and see how husbandmen and florists are careful with respect to the flowers, trees, etc., than I think how strange it is that untrained minds are not careful with their children, which are a million times more valuable in comparison. As parents and guardians, we should be specially alert as children are reaching the age of from 10 to 15, the most favorable time, according to the disposition of the child. If they pass that opportunity, in my opinion the chances are they will pass other opportunities further on. That is the most favorable time for opportunities looking toward the soul's awakening, getting their mental eyes open to see things in a new light, to look beyond the trivial affairs of the present time,—from broomstick-horses and rag dolls to higher thoughts. And, if your experience has been anything like mine, it is this: that children of from about 12 to 16 reason just about as well as they will ever reason all their lives. That seems remarkable to be true but my experience teaches me that children reason with a great deal of accuracy at that age, and it is after that that their minds become perverted by false reasoning, and they get the brain powers mixed up; they don't know how to think or what to think; they are getting ideas crowded on one another, and they are learning what deceitfulness is—learning it from neighbors, teachers, friends, or parents, as the case may be, and the honesty that belongs naturally to the minds of many children seems sure to take its flight. Of course, ages and conditions, and children, differ, I am making general suggestions.

We should be on the lookout, then, for all of this, and remember the words of the text. If they can arise as little children with their minds in good condition before they have sown their wild oats, all the better. And yet, strange to say, I have known parents, and Christian parents, too, who have said, Well, I think all children must sow their wild oats. How strange that a Christian parent should so reason! Sow your wild oats and you will reap your wild oats, too. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"—no getting away from it. So my thought is that the child mind from its very earliest opportunity should be kept near to the Divine standard. The parents should be able to express to the child in sympathetic terms these qualities which the child mind is so ready to receive, just like a sponge sucks up water. The mind of the child is ready to absorb very fully the thoughts that are given by sincere parents, or by any person in whom the child has confidence. One great difficulty seems to be that children lose confidence in those whom

they know very well if they find them deceitful. No matter if you have never deceived the child, if it finds out you have deceived other people, or practiced falsehood in any way, its mind is perverted, it loses faith, it keeps that same dishonesty of purpose and thought. Indeed, I have known parents that seemed to think it something wise and proper to teach children to be thrifty, to take advantage of somebody else, and to “fib” a little. I trust that none who have come to a knowledge of Present Truth, and who are before me in this audience today, could have such sentiments, but I am mentioning the matter on general ground, and not with a view of making any specific application of the matter to anybody within the hearing of my voice; for I trust that by the grace of God, having learned the right way ourselves, we are prepared to point the right way to our children and to all with whom we have influence.

Those who do awaken should arise. It is quite possible to awaken and then go to sleep again. Try it in the morning and see. When you first wake there is a certain amount of freshness to the mind, but, if you turn over and doze a little, you may go sound to sleep again. Just so with the soul’s awakening. That is a favorable moment to take advantage of; it means so much blessing; but, if the soul turn around drowsily, or has no encouragement at the proper time, it may drop off to sleep again. So we should encourage those who have awakened to arise from the dead world and be separate from those around them.

What would be the result, then? The next statement of our text is, “And Christ shall give thee light.” He does not give light to those who are not awake. “Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart.” These are approaching righteousness; they have a righteous desire and are approaching uprightness; they have been down and in arising from the dead they are getting upright. The dead are represented as being down. These arise from the dead, and become upright in character, upright in desire, and that is the kind the Lord is pleased to give light to.

What kind of light did he give to us at that time? I am not speaking of Christians; they have not been Christians yet; to merely awake, merely arise from the dead, is not to be a Christian. He gave us the light to see this first of all, that as sinners we have no hope of everlasting life, that the wages of sin is death, but that the gift of God is everlasting life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Then we must accept Christ, must somehow come in conjunction with Him, must lay hold on Him.

And then what? Then we must go on in the light and encourage one another. I have an idea some of us have at times made a mistake in the way of talking a great deal of truth to people without showing them the important point. Here is the point: Truth is for the righteous; truth is for those who have taken their stand on righteousness, on the side of the Lord, and we are trying to tell them the truth without their taking the stand that God does not wish them to know the truth without their taking. They may only understand a

certain limited part. It is to their advantage not to understand beyond, for with an increase of light comes an increase of responsibility. God will not open their eyes beyond a certain degree unless they take certain steps. How kind are all of the divine arrangements! Blessing there, plenty of it, and yet limited to the human will.

Then, after they have responded and said, I see I must come to the Father through you; tell me what I shall I do in order to be an heir of eternal life? then the Master tells them the terms. The light is shining more. The Lord now says, If you desire to be my disciple, you must deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Me; then where I am there shall that disciple be. Unless they take that step, the light will not probably shine much more clearly. They that walk in the light as He is in the light, for them the light is intended, and they go on from grace to grace, from knowledge to knowledge—just as you put one foot forward first, and then the other foot forward, then the other and so on. You may progress in the way of light for the path of the just is as a shining light that shines more and more until the perfect day. So, then, this message of the Lord to us is full consecration.

When do we become members of the Body of Christ? Not when we wake up, not when we first rise from the dead. That is a great mistake many of us made in the past; we did not know what it meant to be a Christian. We were merely looking toward Christianity, merely getting the soul awakening to see that there is such a thing as harmony with God, and escape the condemnation that is on the world. There is still condemnation upon all except those who are in Christ Jesus. The Apostle truly says, therefore there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus and who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. It is from the moment we get into Christ Jesus that we lose all condemnation, and it is from that time that we lose the condemnation of death that came on our race through Adam, that we begin to have the opportunity of life, because, you see, it is a trial for life. The first trial for life was given to father Adam, and, when he failed, condemnation came on all. Now no man can be tried twice unless in the meantime he has been cleared of the previous condemnation, when it is a capital offense. That is the end of the matter. Now we, as a race, were sentenced to death by God's Law, "Dying thou shalt die." The whole race is under it. Nobody can have a second trial through Christ until he gets out from under the first condemnation that came through Adam, and so merely the awakening does not give us our second trial. Arising from the dead, and seeking to live an honest, decent life, would not mean that we had passed into trial. It is only the Church that is on trial; the world is not on trial at all. Not until after you come into the Body of Christ a have Christ's merit imputed to you to cover your imperfections and to make you acceptable sacrifices can you come into relationship with God at all. Thus He makes certain terms with you by which you can become heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, your Lord. No one is on trial for eternal life except those who have been begotten of the Holy Spirit, because all the race are still under condemnation of the Adamic sin. Does not that make it clear who is on trial now, and who will be on

trial by and by? The world's judgment lies in the future and the Church's judgment commences the moment any one of us comes into the Church. It has been going on for nearly 1,900 years. The head of the Church has been tried first and found worthy—"Worthy is the Lamb." He was glorified. The apostles were tried, and the Church all the way down has been under trial. By and by the Church's trials will be finished, the last member will pass beyond the wail and enter into the joys of his Lord. Only those thus begotten of the spirit are on trial for life on the spirit plane, whether they get the highest place, the Divine nature, members of the Royal Priesthood, or whether they get a lower place on the spirit plane as members of the Levite class, the greater company. And St. Paul says, in the 6th chapter of his letter to the Hebrews, that those who have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, if they shall fall away and turn their back on the savior, their portion would be the second death. But that would not be very many, for the world has not tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, and been made partakers of the Holy Spirit.

Amongst those who have come into Christ are included you and myself, I trust,—and not us merely; we should not think that merely those who are associated with the Bible Students' Association would be the elect of God, but all who belong to the Lord, whether Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans or Catholics, whatever they may be, if they belong to Christ, though they may have more or less ignorance of the Lord and His plan, and of the Bible, yet, if they belong to the Lord, He is their head, He is to be the guide and He will be the instructor. And in the School of Christ they must be brought to a certain amount of development where they will be ready for the Kingdom. To some who have come into the Church of Christ we might apply our text and say, "Awake, thou that sleepest." I am not sure but what a good many of the Church are sleep. The Apostle seems in the very connection of this text to imply that some of God's people who have escaped from the world and the bondage of sin and death, and have come into Christ as New Creatures, have gone to sleep on the matter, sleeping with the world, overcharged with the cares of this life, Jesus says, and they are in danger. The sleepy ones will not be in the Kingdom. The Apostle says that we are not of them that sleep, but we are children of the day, so, therefore, be awake and sober, looking for the great salvation that is to be brought unto us. There is a certain sense in which, if we go to sleep now as Christians, we become overcharged with the cares of this life; it is usually with the world that is dead, whether it be by intermarrying with the world, and thus have the spirit of the world brought close to us and are overcome by the influences of it, or whether it be by business entanglements, or alliances, or partnerships, or what not, that may not be favorable to our spiritual interests and consecration to God. There is a great danger that after you become one of the Lord's people, after you have become thoroughly awake, after you are a member of the Body of Christ, and after understanding a good deal of the Truth even, you might become overcharged with the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches. Probably you might get the deceitfulness of riches without getting the riches; just as many

people and more get into trouble without the riches as with the riches; it is trying to get the riches that has the deceitful part in it.

My text is also applicable to the future age. We considered the world and its awakening, and the Christian and his awakening and staying awake, now look forward and see that this text will apply to the world during the Millennial Age. The world will be asleep, some them asleep in death, and some of them asleep in ignorance and superstition, but there will be a great racket at the beginning of that new day, and the majority of people who are not in their graves will certainly get awake. I think I see that some of the worldly people are even getting awake now, and, as the racket goes on and the day of trouble comes, I think the whole world is going to get awake, and then Christ will give them light. The whole thousand years will be a time of arising from the dead. Not merely those who are in their graves will arise from the dead, but all those who will be living at the time the Kingdom is established, and before any are awakened from the tomb, will begin to get awake and arise from sin and evil conditions, trying to get up a little higher, and more awake, and get more of the blessings that will be coming at that time from the glorious Sun of Righteousness, the Lord Himself and the Church with Him. Christ and the Church are in the Scriptures represented as being the Sun of Righteousness that will arise with healing in its beams. Then the poor world that is in sorrow and pain, and sighing, and crying, that has been afflicted of the Devil for 6,000 years, will begin to look up to the great Redeemer for deliverance from the power of the Devil, and the Devil will be bound for that 1,000 years and have no power to deceive them any more, and the true light will shine out and all the darkness will be scattered. Glory to God for that!

Will they all awake? The Word says that all the blind eyes shall be opened, and all the deaf ears unstopped, and the knowledge of the glory of God shall fill the whole earth as the waters cover the great deep, until none shall any longer say to his neighbor and brother, Know thou the Lord, because all shall know Him from the least unto the greatest.

How about those who will prefer to be asleep and won't arise from the dead state? The Bible indicates that a hundred years of patience on the part of the Lord Jesus as the great King and Priest will give the opportunity to every one of those to reconsider and take the proper view and to respond, and to love righteousness and hate iniquity, and, if by the end of that hundred years they are not found in harmony with God, they shall be destroyed from among the people. There will be no further opportunity for them; they will have had all that was ever intended for them by Divine wisdom.

On the contrary, those who will be awake and come to the light the Lord will give more and more light. It will not be the perfect day all at once. That great Sun of Righteousness, like our natural sun which is the picture of it, will have a gradual rising; gradually its rays will dispel the darkness and clouds and bring more daylight, and so during that thousand years the world will be rising, and rising, and rising—arising from

the dead! It will take the whole thousand years for them to completely arise from the dead. One says, Why does not Christ do it all for them? Because it is far better that He should help them do it themselves; he is taking the best way; it is His blessing but His blessing comes in the most practical way. The person who thus learns to cooperate with the Lord will be forming a character, so that at the end of the thousand years he will have formed a character based upon experience. He will have had experience with right and wrong, and, backed by all that experience, having attained the full perfection of human nature, Oh, what a wonderful being he will be! Will he be proof against sin? He should be; there is no excuse for anyone who would not be then. But this restored man, when brought back to the image of his Creator, will have a personal test. All through the thousand years they will be under the Mediator's control and guidance as the great King, and any wrong will be punished and any right will be blessed, but, when they reach the end of the thousand year Messiah will give over His Kingdom, and they will be left to themselves. Those who have formed character, who have really learned to love that which is right and to hate that which is wrong, will be ready for any kind of a test, and those who have not come to such a determination will not be ready for every test, and God will then bring the test against them. We may not know definitely the character of the temptation. In Revelation it is symbolically represented as the loosing of Satan and his going forth to tempt the world. No matter what the temptation is, we may know it will be a very crucial one. Everybody who has any sympathy for wrong will be deceived into taking the wrong course. We presume that those who reach perfection there would not take the wrong course if they realized it would bring death on them; they would dodge the wrong course then just for fear of death. But God is not pleased to give eternal life to those who would merely dodge the penalty; He only wants those to have eternal life who love the right as He loves the right. God is not afraid of any punishment in connection with Himself; it is because right is right that God loves the right, and He wants of those who would enjoy His favor of everlasting life to also love right because right is right. He wants them to hate wrong because wrong is wrong.

If any of them are destroyed in the second death, one asks if that would not be an unkindness on God's part? They had no rights at all, because they were born without any life rights. God never made them any promise of life everlasting. It is only indirectly He has told His people that He intends to provide a way of escape to the whole human family. Nobody has a promise from God. God merely said to Abraham, and to the Church through the prophets and apostles, what He intends to do for the world; He has not promised the world a thing; He is going to give it as free grace. These blessings of God which we are now enjoying should be appreciated from the standpoint of right and wrong, and you and I must learn to appreciate these principles in the same way that the world in the future must learn. Otherwise we will not be acceptable with the Lord. He seeketh such to worship Him now, and then, and always, and everywhere—angels and men—God seeketh such to worship Him as worship Him in spirit and in truth, such as love righteousness and hate iniquity. I hope we can all mark that down clear in our minds

so we can press on loving the right, standing for the right, and eschewing all wrong, even if the wrong should be to our advantage.

Here I will leave the matter with you, dear friends. “Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” He is to be the great Light-giver, the great enlightener of all mankind; as He has declared, “This is the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”