

INTRODUCTION

One of the first church jokes I remember hearing is about the deacon who always went to sleep when his pastor started preaching. One Sunday, the pastor decided to play a trick on him. He started preaching, and sure enough, the drowsy deacon was soon sound asleep. The pastor said quietly, "Everyone who wants to go to heaven, stand up." Everyone in the congregation stood up except the snoozing man. The pastor had everyone be seated and said, "Now, everyone who wants to go to hell, STAND UP!"

When he yelled that, the deacon jerked awake and jumped to his feet. He looked around and said, "I don't know what we're voting on, pastor, but you and I are the only ones in favor of it!"

There's a viral YouTube video about a Baptist preacher in Oklahoma who sees someone sleeping during his sermon and he walks down and shames the young man in front of the congregation. Then he proceeds to berate individual church members by name. He gives Baptist preachers a bad name.

I prefer you to stay awake when I teach. But I've said before that if this is the only time in your hectic life that you slow down and get still, and you find yourself nodding off, go ahead and take a nap. At least you got something from the message!

There's something more dangerous than physical sleep in church—it's being asleep spiritually. In these last days, we need to be spiritually awake and alert. Here's what Paul wrote about this topic.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. "Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

I borrowed the title of this message from a song Keith Green wrote and recorded in the early 1980s. Keith was a pre-teen heartthrob who signed a rock-n-roll contract with Decca Records in 1965 when he was only twelve years old. By age twelve he had already written forty original songs. He was from a Jewish family, and as a teenager came to know Jesus. Later, he and his wife, Melody, started Last Days Ministries. They were based here in East Texas out at Garden Valley where Teen Mania is currently located. Keith and two of his children died tragically in a plane crash in 1982. They're buried in the cemetery behind Garden Valley Baptist Church. I

want to encourage this younger generation of Christians to download and listen to his music because he was like a musical prophet. His song, "Asleep in the Light" was a wake-up call to the church for being so apathetic about reaching lost people. Some of the lyrics are:

"Do you see, do you see; All the people sinking down? Don't you care, don't you care; Are you gonna let them drown? How can you be so numb; Not to care if they come? You close your eyes; And pretend the job's done. The world is sleeping in the dark; And the church just can't fight; Cause it's asleep in the light. How can you be so dead; When you've been so well fed? Jesus rose from the grave; And you, you can't even get out of bed! Oh, Jesus rose from the dead; Come on, get out of your bed!"

In this passage of scripture, God is calling on us to do three things.

I. WAKE UP FROM OUR SPIRITUAL APATHY!

In verse six Paul wrote, "So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled."

Paul used the contrast between light and darkness to describe the difference between two world-views. The Christians in Thessalonica had once been a part of the kingdom of darkness, under the control of the devil, the Prince of Darkness. Since Jesus had become their Lord, they were part of a new Kingdom, the Kingdom of Light.

Whenever you read about light and darkness in the Bible, you should think of Genesis. Before the creation, there was darkness over the deep and God said, "Let there be LIGHT." He saw that the light was good and He separated the light from the darkness. This is creation language.

This theme is repeated in John 1. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God and the Word was with God. This is talking about Jesus, who brings a new creation. The Bible says, "In Him was LIFE and that life was the light of men." (John 1:4) There's a line from an old hymn that says, "The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin. The light of the world is Jesus."

The world without Jesus is still in darkness. They are asleep. But the danger is that believers, who are in the light, are spiritually asleep as well. Here's the dictionary definition of sleep: "A state of inactivity with a loss of consciousness and a decrease in responsiveness to the events taking place around you." In other words, when you're asleep, you're unaware of what's going on around you.

When you're spiritually asleep it means you're unaware of what God is doing right now in the world. The Bible tells us in many places that we need to wake up. "And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." (Romans 13:11)

There are many of you here today who are physically awake. Your eyes are open. You're aware of me, and what I'm saying. You're aware of the people around you. But are you aware of what God is doing in the world?

Do you really want to wake up spiritually? We're all familiar with the little signs you can hang on a hotel door that says, "Do not disturb." As God looks through this gathering today, how many of you have hung a "Do not disturb" sign on your heart. You don't want to get excited about sharing your faith or living for Jesus. You're content as long as you have your ticket to heaven. I believe the unspoken attitude of millions of Christians is: "I'm content to come to church, to sit, to stand, to watch what you're doing, hear what you're saying and go home totally unchanged. Do not disturb me."

Sometimes people are so content, they just get into a spiritual rut, where nothing ever changes. A rut is nothing but a grave with both ends kicked out. God is trying to say to every one of us today, "Hey, wake up! The alarm has gone off." I know that part of the problem is with us preachers. There is so much sermonic Sominex dispensed in churches today, it lulls people to sleep. Today, God is trying to say to Green Acres Baptist Church, "Wake up from your apathy." Do you know what apathy is? Do you care what apathy is? Maybe you heard about the survey that asked, "What is the number one problem, ignorance or apathy?" The number one answer was, "I don't know and I don't care." Apathy is when you don't care what is going on in the world, in your church, spiritually. You are just content to do your little thing, go home and continue your life. That is spiritual apathy.

One of my spiritual mentors was Vance Havner. I heard him preach several times before he went to heaven. He was rather boring to hear, but he had a gift for expressing spiritual truth in his writings. In one book he wrote: "Everybody is tired. I'm glad the Lord fails not; neither is weary, because everybody else today is tuckered out. We go to bed tired. We get up tired. It seems a deep sleep has descended upon us and the Devil has chloroformed the atmosphere. We need to take down our 'do not disturb' signs, snap out of our stupor, come out our coma, and awake from our apathy." (*When God Breaks Through*, p. 21) I say amen to that.

II. DRESS UP IN OUR SPIRITUAL ARMOR!

The next thing Paul wrote was, "Putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet."

In the sixth chapter of Ephesians, Paul writes about spiritual warfare. In that passage, he mentions six pieces of spiritual armor. There's the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of piece, the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Here, he mentions two pieces of armor, the breastplate and the helmet. The breastplate protects your heart and the helmet protects your mind. A chest wound can be fatal, so Roman soldiers wore a breastplate to protect their vital organs. The Bible calls it a breastplate of righteousness. It's not our righteousness, because our righteousness is like filthy rags. It's the righteousness of Jesus that protects our hearts. When we put on the righteousness of Jesus, God no longer sees our unrighteousness; instead He sees the righteousness of His perfect Son. Breastplates had a front and a back. Two leather straps connected the back plate to the breastplate. Faith puts on the back plate. It's like faith says, "I've got your back." Love puts on the breastplate, because love comes from the heart. So that's how we put on faith and love as a breastplate.

The helmet of salvation protects our head, which contains our brain, or in spiritual terms, our mind. When I was in high school football game, I was running with the ball, and one of the opposing players grabbed the side of my helmet inadvertently. The chin strap popped off my helmet came off my head and went rolling onto the field. My mother said she almost had a heart attack. She thought maybe my head was still in that helmet. I didn't do a very smart thing. I still had the ball and I was still up so I just lowered my head and kept on running. The next thing I knew I was on the sidelines with smelling salts under my nose. Never run into a group of guys who have helmets on if you do not. That's why as Christians we shouldn't dare try to go out into spiritual warfare without this helmet of salvation.

What is the application? Just as our truth, righteousness and peace is found in Jesus, so is our salvation is in Jesus. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) This helmet of salvation protects us from doubt. There are two kinds of Christians here this morning. Some of you have been delivered from doubt; you have absolute, total assurance of your salvation. If I were to ask you "Are you a believer? Do you know the Lord?" You would immediately respond, "Oh, yes, pastor. I know the Lord. I'm going to heaven when I die. I am a Christian. Jesus is so real to me!" The second kind of believers when asked the same question responds with "I think so. I really hope I will." As a Christian should have absolute, total assurance of your salvation so you never ever doubt again. John wrote, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." (1 John 5:13)

I have this helmet of salvation that gives me total and absolute protection from doubt. I am so certain of my salvation, that if an angel appeared right now and pointed his finger at me and said, "David Dykes, you are lost. You are not a Christian. You are going to go to hell when you die." I'd look at that angel and say, "Angel you don't know what you're talking about. You don't understand salvation and you are probably a disguised emissary of the evil one." An angel couldn't get me to doubt my salvation. Do you have that kind of assurance? You can when you put on the helmet of salvation. The helmet is not salvation. Jesus is your salvation. The helmet is how you think once you are saved.

Why do we need to wear spiritual armor? Because life is tough and we're going to face evil days. Paul wrote, "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand." (Ephesians 6:13)

We've heard a lot lately about the "stand your ground" law. The Bible isn't talking about a legal term; it's talking standing firm spiritually. Notice Paul says there is going to be a day of evil that will come. I was reading this passage not long ago and the Lord impressed on my heart that every one of us are going to have a day that will be the worst day of our lives. It will be THE day of evil for you. Some people have already had the worst day they'll ever live. Did you stand firm? For others, that day hasn't come yet. So stay dress up in God's armor so you can stand your ground when your world falls apart.

God is saying, "Wake up from your apathy; Dress up in your armor." And finally we're told to

III. BUILD UP OUR SPIRITUAL ALLIES!

Paul concluded this section on the second coming with this directive, "Encourage one another and build each other up."

The words you speak to people can either build them up or tear them down. In the book of James we read that the tongue can either be a refreshing fountain, or a deadly fire. Do you use your words to refresh people, or to burn them up?

Have you ever said something that as soon as you said it, you wished you could take it back? The problem for some people is that they put their mouth in motion before their brain is in gear. That reminds me of the old proverb that says, "He that thinks by the inch and speaks by the yard deserves to be kicked by the foot."

Your tongue can get you into a lot of trouble, or it can get you out of trouble. A college student was working in the produce section of a grocery store. A little old lady came in and said, "Sonny, can I buy half a head of lettuce?" He said, "I don't know if we sell only half a head of lettuce, I'll go ask the manager." So the young man took off through the store and finally found the manager. He said, "Sir, there's an idiot over there who wants to buy half a head of lettuce." But the kid hadn't realized that the little old lady was pretty fast, and she had followed him step for step, and as he was speaking the manager he saw her out of the corner of his eye. He recovered by saying, "Sire, there's an idiot over there who wants to buy half a head of lettuce...and this dear lady wants to buy the other half." So, they took care of the customer, and the manager realized this college study was pretty sharp. He said, "Where are you from, son?" He replied, "I'm from St. Paul, Minnesota, home of the world's greatest football teams and the world's ugliest women." The manager said, "My wife is from St. Paul." Without missing a beat the kid said, "Really, what team did she play for?"

We should only use words that build people up. Paul wrote, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." (Ephesians 4:29)

Sometimes just a single word of encouragement can make a difference in someone's life. There's a true story about a banker in New York City who passed a beggar every day outside his bank. The beggar was legless and had a cup of pencils he was trying to sell. Most people ignored him or dropped a few coins in his hat. But this particular banker insisted on buying a pencil every day. He would say, "This isn't a hand out. You're a merchant, and I enjoy doing business with an honest businessman."

One day the beggar was no longer there. Weeks later, the banker saw the man in Grand Central Station where he had opened a concession stand. The man said, "I had hoped you would come by. I'm here because of you. You told me that I was a merchant, not a beggar. You gave me self-respect. And so I sold pencils—lots of them. I saved my money, and now I'm here. Thanks for the encouragement."

Everyone is struggling with something, so everyone needs encouragement. The Scottish theologian William Barclay wrote: "One of our highest duties is the duty of encouragement. It is easy to laugh at a man's ideal; it is easy to pour cold water on their enthusiasm. The world is full of discouragers. But we have a Divine Calling to encourage one another. Many a time a P.A.T. on the back (Praise, Appreciation, Thanks) has kept a man on his feet."

Paul not only told the believers to encourage one another, he encouraged them. He wrote, "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him." (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10) God has a plan for your life, and that plan doesn't involve experiencing God's wrath because of your sin. He has appointed you to receive salvation through Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

Have you ever heard a song, and thought that it was a Christian song, only to discover it wasn't? They say confession is good for the soul, but bad for the reputation. I'll confess one of the dumbest things I ever did. My senior year in high school there was a song that came out that said, "One toke over the line sweet Jesus, one toke over the line. Sittin' downtown in a railway station. One toke over the line." I had no idea at the time that a toke was a marijuana cigarette. I thought the song was saying, "One TOE over the line, sweet Jesus." I thought the song was about Jesus, so I learned the guitar chords and another Christian girl and I sang it at a school assembly. We thought we were promoting the Lord, but we were really promoting drug use!

Since then, I've been pretty careful about saying a song was a Christian song when it really wasn't. And a few years ago, I had the same experience. I heard a song by Evanescence called "Bring Me to Life." I thought it was a Christian song, but it's really not. But the lyrics could be a prayer that goes along with this message. This is also one of our BodyPump songs: "How can you see into my eyes like open doors, / Leading you down into my core, where I've become so numb? / Without a soul, my spirit sleeping somewhere cold, / Until you find it there and lead it back home. / Wake me up inside, Wake me up inside, / Call my name and save me from the dark. / Bid my blood to run, / Before I come undone; / Save me from the nothing I've become. / Bring me to life."

I never use a snooze button on an alarm clock. I'm one of those annoying people who wake up and jump out of bed. I think snooze buttons are of the devil. I've known some people who would set their alarm an hour before they needed to get up, just so they can go back to sleep and keep hitting the snooze button over and over again.

When you're spiritually asleep, hitting the snooze button is your way of saying, "Not now, God. I'll change tomorrow. I'll start living for you tomorrow. I'll start sharing my faith tomorrow. I'll start serving you tomorrow." Throw away the snooze button and wake up! Dress up! And build Up!

OUTLINE

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"So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled." vs. 6

"And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." *Romans 13:11*

II. DRESS UP IN OUR SPIRITUAL ARMOR!

"Putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet." vs. 8

"Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand." *Ephesians 6:13*

III. BUILD UP OUR SPIRITUAL ALLIES!

"Encourage one another and build each other up." vs. 11

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes