

In 1599, Philip Nicolai's beautiful advent hymn put it this way: "Wake, Awake, for night is flying." In 2016, Twitter hashtags tell you to "stay woke". Both of these phrases are calling for you to be aware of what's going on around you, to open your eyes to what's happening. The people who use speak these words are trying first to command your attention, and second, to call you to action. You need to be aware of some reality, and then respond to it.

We're currently living in a culture that *loves* to raise awareness. All around you are different causes and concerns clamoring for your attention and for your wallet. You're surrounded by a hundred different voices; there's no way that you can stay awake long enough to *hear* each voice, much less *respond* to each one. You need to tune some voices out and teach yourself what to sleep through and what to wake up for. Fortunately for all you moms, you've been practicing this skill from the moment your baby was born. You know which grunts and snuffles to sleep through, and which cries mean that your night is over.

For Christians, Jesus is not just one more voice among the many. If Jesus is your Lord, then when He speaks, you listen to His voice above all others. "Stay awake", Jesus says in Matthew, and through Paul in Romans. So where does Jesus want your attention? What causes does He want you to consider? For those of you who are exhausted activists, worn out by the clamor of voices around you, overwhelmed by good causes and opportunities, here's some good news: you only need to listen to one voice. For those of you who are seeking freedom from your laziness and complacency, here's some good news: Jesus tells you what to care about, and if His voice can raise the dead, it can certainly wake you up and get your butt off the couch.

But first things first: What is Jesus saying? In Matthew, against the backdrop of Noah's flood, Jesus tells His disciples to *stay awake*, which He then explains in verse 44 to mean *be ready*. To be *awake* is to be *ready* and *expectant*. To be asleep is to be *unaware* or *unready*; and the great enemy of staying awake in this first text isn't *sin*, which we might have expected, but actually just normal life, just doing the next thing. Ordinary life – eating, drinking, marrying, burying, working in the field or at the mill, can lull you to sleep when it comes to God.

And this is our temptation, isn't it? We believe in God, we try to live in ways that please Him, but it is so easy for us to get caught up in the day to day that we forget to lift our eyes up to heaven. We don't really expect God to show up, and so we aren't prepared when He does.

Now, this morning, we're not really going to look at what sort of coming Jesus is talking about, whether it's a judgment coming like the flood or the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70, or a personal coming, like the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, or the Second Coming, or a more metaphorical idea of Jesus "coming" for you as an individual when you die. There is probably something helpful about thinking through each one of those options, but the text isn't focusing on *how* Jesus comes. The problem isn't that people in Noah's day, or Jesus' day, or our day aren't thinking of the *right kind* of coming; they aren't ready for *any* sort of coming. And so the first thing we need to do today is let the Word of God shake us awake: Jesus is coming. Are you ready?

And as we see in v. 43, staying awake *begins* with simply being *aware* that Jesus is coming, but it doesn't *end* there. No, if you're awake to the reality of God, then you'll live your life differently. If you know the thief is coming, you keep a lookout. Now, it's a pretty startling image, for Jesus to compare Himself to a burglar, but don't get distracted – Jesus is raising your sense of how important this is.

Here's a contrast: some of you knew exactly when the Supermoon was coming, and had your telescopes pointed right at it. Some of you still don't know what a Supermoon is. If Jesus had said, "I'm coming like a Supermoon, so watch for me like you watched for the Supermoon." If you found the Supermoon ignorable, and Jesus' compares himself to the Supermoon, then you'll find Jesus ignorable, too.

And for many people, this is how they hear about all sorts of causes that people tell them they should stay awake for: global warming, breast cancer, starving orphans in third world countries, Black Lives Matter, whatever it is, it is not enough simply to make them *aware* of something; you also need to *persuade them to respond*. The difference is the difference between hitting the snooze button and getting out of bed!

And so Jesus uses a metaphor that gets you out of bed: "I'm coming like a thief in the night." You might sleep through a Supermoon even if you knew it was coming, but who sleeps through the threat of a home invasion? Some of you will have trouble getting to sleep tonight just because I mentioned the possibility of a hooded prowler jiggling the locks and testing the windows, sneaking silently through your downstairs as you and your family sleep up above. Something will go "bump" tonight, and instead of snoring, you'll sit straight up and go check the door one more time, because of the sermon. Sorry to ruin your night, but here's the point: Jesus is trying to provoke a strong enough response that you won't just hit the snooze button.

Okay, so where are we so far? You're awake – you know that Jesus is coming. You've gotten out of bed – you know that you can't ignore Him. Is that all, or is there more?

There's more, in Rom. 13: the point of waking up, the point of getting out of bed, is so that you can "walk properly as in the daytime." The reason you set your alarm and don't just keep hitting snooze, is so that you can get to work on time! How silly would it be to wake up, get out of bed, and then *not* do whatever it is that you got up for! So when Jesus says "Wake up!", what He means is, "Live differently!"

If you don't get to work, you might just as well have stayed asleep. For Paul, to be asleep means to be engaged in things that you want the darkness to hide, things like sexual immorality, drunkenness, quarrelling, jealousy. The reason you do those things at night is because you want your actions stay in the shadows, but Paul is announcing that the dawn is breaking; it's daytime! That's the message of Advent – the light is coming. And here's Paul's application, in the form of a question: when the light of Christ shines on you, what should you be doing?

Another way to put this is that *God's priority for your wakefulness is your personal holiness*. The most important cause for you to engage is putting your own sin to death, casting off the works of darkness, and putting on the armor of light, putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus calls you to; this is why He woke you up.

This is not to say that other causes are misguided or unimportant. It does mean that they are *less* important, and the reason they are less important than your holiness is because your holiness is the source of your spiritual power. The world is facing many challenges: hunger, poverty, injustice, abuse, and so on. Many of these problems are deeply embedded into the way the world works, and there is no obvious way that your individual decisions, your personal crusade against injustice will have any effect. And so there is a strong pull towards “stay woke” awareness activism, seeking to pool influence and resources to tackle big problems. If you can wake up enough other people, what you can all do together might actually make a difference.

And for people who feel the pull of that sort of activism, Jesus' call to personal holiness can seem very frustrating and ineffective, a sort of feeble quietism. Taking the time to grow in holiness seems like a luxury that the world cannot afford.

But Jesus has not misdiagnosed the world, and He has not offered a placebo for a solution. He has actually looked deeper than many activists, even those who act in His name. By saying “Wake up and fight sin.” He's looked deep enough to see that you cannot be the solution at the same time you are the problem. If you don't have self-control over food and drink, you aren't going to solve world hunger. Porn addicts cannot lead the fight against sex trafficking. Greedy people, jealous people, people who try to do good for the world with other people's money will not set the world free from economic injustice.

The reason Jesus prescribes *holiness* as the treatment for the world is because *sin* is the disease. Symptoms like hunger, injustice, and sexual brokenness can only be solved when the underlying disease responds to treatment. When we see this, we see why sinful saviors cannot save anyone from sin. You can't cure the disease if you are the carrier. To use another of Jesus' metaphors, the issues and causes that we are so concerned about are specks in the worlds' eye. We are no help until we get the log of sin out of our own.

Ultimately, these things come together in the person of Jesus Christ. As Christians, we believe that what the world is *Jesus*. Jesus is what the poor need; Jesus is what the hungry need; Jesus is what the vulnerable and the abused need. These problems exist because of sin, and Jesus entered the world in order to deal with sin.

Now, people suffering the effects of sin don't need to be given a tract and told to be warmed and filled. If that's all they needed, then it wouldn't matter if we were holy or not. What the world needs is to be filled with people who think like Jesus, who talk like Jesus, who live like Jesus, and who love like Jesus. That's what will solve the problems of this world.

If that's true, the most urgent need in the world is not more advocacy groups, more awareness, or more activism. It needs more healthy Churches, extensions of the body of Christ, more forgiven saints who have been woken up from the sleep of sin, and who live in the daylight.

And living in the daylight looks like this: it looks like making no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. So awaken your heart to the danger feeding your lusts. Awaken your heart to the evil of drunkenness. Awaken your heart to the sinfulness of any and all sexual desires other than those of a husband for his wife and a wife for her husband. Be alert for when your body says "I want to look at that/listen to that/taste that/touch that". Be ready to say no if God says no. Wake up to how evil it is to quarrel in light of the coming of the Son of Man. Cast off jealousy: if Christians didn't envy the world's sex, money, or fame, we could dispel a lot of darkness.

Maybe you've fallen asleep on some of these issues. Maybe you were once awakened to see the sinfulness of sin, but now you've rolled over and gone back to sleep. When was the last time you got drunk? When was the last time you looked at porn? When was the last time you had a quarrel? Maybe you've been hitting the snooze button on holiness. Maybe someone could get you to join any effort or contribute to any cause before the Word of God could prompt you to spend five minutes in trying to understand what sensuality is, or how to recognize jealousy when it rises up in your heart.

And this is why preaching and hearing the gospel and living lives that make the gospel credible is so very important. The Word of God sounds the alarm to a sleeping world, and your neighbor doesn't need to see you rolling over with your head under the pillow. They need to see you jump out of bed and run towards the light.

If there is one image that captures the essence of Advent, it is light shining in the darkness, the true light coming into the world. Advent is when the dawn of grace broke over a drowsy world, and today God says to you that your salvation is nearer now than it was then. So wake up, get out of bed, and walk in the light!

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*Let us pray:*

Almighty God, awaken our hearts, and give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light. We ask for this now at the beginning of the season of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; so that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.