

“Awake, Put On Thy Strength”
Isaiah 51:19; 52:1

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The words of these texts were spoken when Isaiah was the great prophet in Israel. Israel, as a nation, was in a terrible plight according to Isaiah 51:19. Two things had come upon them “desolation and destruction.” Israel was rapidly being overcome by her enemies. Her walled cities and villages, her vineyards and sheep folds were being destroyed and made desolate. According to this same verse, Israel was having “famine and the sword.” She was a prey to hunger, disease, and unsuccessful wars with her enemies.

Isaiah also prophesied that she should be entirely overrun by her enemies; and Jerusalem should be destroyed and they should be carried away captive into a foreign land. Out of this and plight Israel, in verse 9, cried to God, “Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O arm of the Lord.” They then reminded God that at one time He had fought their battles and had led them across the sea and the great deep and had made the depths of the great sea a way for them to pass over. In other words, they reminded God of the great things He had previously done for them. He answered them that in truth He had done these things for them and asked them in verse 13 why they had “forgotten the Lord, thy Maker, who had stretched forth the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth.” In verse 15 He says, “I am the Lord thy God, that divided the sea whose waves roared.” He also adds that, “I have put words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of my hand.” In other words, God hears the cry of Israel. He confesses He has been to them all they say He has and that He has done for them all they have claimed. But in the fifty-second chapter and first verse, He calls upon Israel to, “Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion.” He has done for them; and He is still able, and still willing to do for them. He calls their attention to the fact that trouble is not that He is asleep at all, but that they are asleep, and have not put on the power which is theirs.

We find here then that there are times when, to many, God seems to be asleep; when He does not manifest the great power which we know He possesses. Such times occur often in the Scriptures. For instance, He allows Israel to be overrun by her enemies and conquered by power, which it seems strange God could allow to defeat Israel. There are many of these troublesome days in which we are living who ask time and again, “Why does God allow the great troubles of the present day, and seems to be doing nothing about it.” We see a world that is overrun with war, hatred, famine and trouble and we see nations overrunning nations and such destruction as the world has seldom or never seen. We see the church with empty pews, an indifferent membership, and with a crying lack of volunteer workers. We see our missionaries being called home from their fruitful fields. No wonder we find ourselves uttering the cry of Israel of old, “Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O arm of the Lord.”

But we hear God answer as of old that He is awake and that the Church and the nations should awaken and put on their strength.

God told Israel why she was in her pitiful condition. He said it was not because He was asleep; but it was because they were asleep, and were not using the power she had. Well might we, of

the Church, and of America, hear the warning of God to awaken and to arise and put on our strength, and go forth to conquer.

The first reason God gives Israel for her failure was that they were not trusting Him. Here in the passage under consideration we find that the Lord says, "There is none to guide her among all of the sons whom she hath brought forth! Neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons that she hath brought forth – thy sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as a wile bull in a net." Israel had been trusting her leaders and not calling upon Him and now they find these leaders are unable to help her. They are in confusion and do not know which way to turn.

Again in Isaiah the thirty-first chapter and verses one and three he says, "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, and stay on horses and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord – now the Egyptians are men and not God; and their horses flesh and not spirit. When the Lord shall stretch out His hand, both he that helpeth shall fail, and he that is helped shall fall down, and they shall all fail together." Again in verse 6 He says, "Turn ye unto Him who from the children of Israel have deeply revolted." God again in the fiftieth chapter, verses two and three says, "Wherefore when I came, was there no man. When I called was there none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Behold at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make rivers covering." We turn again to the same prophet in chapter forty three, verses twenty-two and twenty-four and find that God says to Israel, "Though has not called upon me; ye have brought no offering to me, but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins."

Here God says was Israel's trouble, she was asleep because she had depended upon her leaders, her allies and the power of earthly armaments but had not asked Him for help. Today nations and the Church are crying to God asking why He is asleep. But does not God cry back to us, "You are asleep and depending upon others and forgetting me." Czechoslovakia, Poland and other nations put their trust in allies and did not turn unto God and ask for aid. Holland, Belgium, France and the Scandinavian countries have been overrun and have cried what is the trouble with God. Great Britain is making the same mistake as Israel. She says with our armies, navies, air force and help of our American allies we will win the war. We here in America are doing the same. We are spending billions on preparation; feverishly building ships, tanks, airplanes and are boasting that with these we will be impregnable. I am heartily in favor of the preparedness program, but after all, what do they amount to? What dependence can be put upon them? A great earthquake could destroy our factories, a great storm at sea could wipe out much of our navy and a storm in the skies could destroy our planes. We have forgotten that no matter what armaments we may have built, God is still the ruler of the heavens, the earth and the sea. Yet we boast of what we can do without any thought of turning to God and seeking His guidance, help and aid.

But the Church cannot point the finger of scorn at the nations, for we too have, to a large extent, failed to call upon God. We build our fine buildings, train our fine preachers, organize our fine choirs, perfect our organizations of women, men and young people and say, look at all of these things we have and thus forget that after all, God is the only One who can make all of these things worth while, and because we have not had the great influence of Christ in the world we

should have had, we cry, "Look at us and our buildings and organizations, what is the matter with God, why does He not awaken?" But God is crying to the Church and to the nations, "I am not asleep, I have the power, my arm is not shortened, why do you not awaken to your own weakness and call upon Me?" Oh, how we need to remember in these days the great truth, "It is not by might but My Spirit saith the Lord." God is ready to help the nations and the Church, but He cannot do so until we turn unto Him for help.

The second reason why we find God seems to be asleep, silent and powerless is because of our lack of faith. In the thirteenth chapter of Matthew we find that Christ returns to Nazareth after having performed miracles elsewhere in Palestine, but there in Nazareth, He was unable to do any mighty work. We do not have to look for the reason. He tells us His power was limited because of their unbelief.

When we turn to the great faith chapter in Hebrews eleven we find mighty things wrought by God through faith. Moses led the children of Israel out of bondage, across the Red Sea unto the wilderness where they were marvelously fed and cared for and on to the border of the Promised Land. Joshua led them across the Jordan on dry land and saw the walls of Jericho fall. Gideon, with a company of three hundred men, by faith in God, defeated a whole army. David, refusing the use of Saul's armor, because he knew nothing about its usefulness, went in simple faith in God with a sling shot and stones to defeat the giant Goliath and put to flight the army of the Philistines and as the author says time forbids to tell of others.

We need to stop and contemplate the mighty things wrought through faith. Yes we cry to God to awake and He says awaken yourselves and put your trust in Me. I can help, I will help, if you will trust Me. But no we trust ourselves, our leaders, our armaments and our organizations and thus when failure stares us in the face, as it did Israel, we cry, "Oh, God awaken!" May we hear Him saying to us today, "Awaken put your faith in Me."

The third reason I find in the Scriptures for God not using His power making it manifest even miraculously is that of the lack of prayer and self-denial. We remember that in Matthew, the seventeenth chapter, Christ had taken Peter, James and John unto the Mount of Transfiguration and when He came down from the Mount He found a father with his boy who was possessed of demons. The disciples had been unable to cast the demons out. Christ spoke and the demons obeyed and when they asked Christ why they could not do it He answers, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting," so God is saying to us, "I have the power, I am not asleep, but you have not sought that power from Me by prayer and self-denial."

That nations of the world surely have neglected this important matter of prayer. Oh, I know a few months ago England declared a Day of Prayer, but it was the first time they had done so in many years. In fact they, as a nation, had not asked God for help since the last war when they were hard pressed and called upon Him. America has gone on with her preparations and spending her money on material armaments, but our government has not declared we must have the help of God, and we can get it, if when we bow before Him in prayer and seek it.

But we of the Church cannot point to the government and criticize them because the Church has allowed its members to all but lose the art of prayer. We can have meetings for almost

everything, but when a meeting is announced for prayer alone it is difficult to secure a large attendance. Surely the Church may cry to God to awaken and help, but we know honestly He can say to us, "Why cry to me to awaken and help? You do not manifest a desire for my help which leads to a sincere, earnest, patient seeking of my help? You live in your luxury, you spend your time in things of pleasure, you spend your money on foolish things. You live in your ceiled houses and allow my house to be neglected. You will not deny yourself for my cause, you will not devote yourself to prayer. If you will awaken deny yourself, seek earnestly my help, you may have it." Oh, the pity that He can say to us, "ye lust and have not, ye kill and desire to have and cannot obtain, ye fight and war, yet ye have not because ye ask not." Our nation and our churches need to awaken to the necessity of prayer and self-denial. Yea, we need to awaken to our neglected privilege of fellowship with God in prayer. His blessing will come when we earnestly seek it in prayer. Awake, Oh Church of God, Awake, Oh America, to your duty of prayer and fasting.

The fourth reason for God withholding His power is found in Isaiah the fifty-ninth chapter and verses one and two. Here we find these words, "Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear."

The Scriptures here tell us that God is not asleep, that He still has the power to accomplish great things on the earth. But these people had evidently prayed and He had not responded. They are informed that God was not asleep, but because of their sins He would not hear them. America today needs to hear what God says to Israel of old. We are living in sin, gambling in prevalent, even legalized by the federal government in many states. The one day God says should be kept holy unto Him has become the great day of pleasure and sin here in America. Our divorce courts break asunder the band of matrimony, which no man is to set asunder. Our people have no regard for God's law or His Book of instructions. We allow the poor to be oppressed and to go hungry in the midst of plenty. The fact that these conditions exists, is sin enough, but added to this is the shameful fact that we say there is nothing wrong in this manifest disobedience to God and His commands. The Church surely is not in a position to lead the nation out of her sinful estate, and cannot be, until she has a great time of repentance and turning from sin to God.

I believe in the preparedness program our government has outlined, as it seems at the present time is needful, but I believe we will find all of that useless unless we turn to God for help, come to the place we will put our trust in Him and pray for His divine assistance and turn from our sins unto a righteous, just, Christ-like manner of life, I would have no fear for the future of this nation if it would do these things, but I am fearful, terribly fearful, for the future of our beloved country unless she does turn to God.

We have cried to God, "Awake, awake put on thy strength, O arm of the Lord," but is it not time we hear Him saying to us, "Awake, awake! Put on thy strength O, Zion"?