

~Other Speakers S-Z: Classic Christian Writings:

The world is still sleeping its sleep of death. It has been a slumber of many generations; sometimes deeper, sometimes lighter --yet still a slumber like that of the tomb, as if destined to continue till the last trumpet sound, and then there shall be no more sleep!

Yet God has not left it to sleep on unwarned. He has spoken in a voice that might reach the dullest ears and quicken the coldest heart. Ten thousand times has He thus spoken and still He speaks. But the world refuses to hear. Its myriads slumber on, as if this sleep of death were the very blessedness of its being.

Yet in one sense the world's sleep has never been universal. Never has there been an age when it could be said there is not one awake. The multitude has always slept, but there has always been a little flock awake. Even in the world's deepest midnight there have been always children of the light and of the day. In the midst of a slumbering world some have been in every age awake. God's voice had reached them, and His mighty power had raised them, and they walked the earth, awake among sleepers, the living among the dead....

Then, when the voice of God awakes not one but thousands, it may be in a day, when whole villages and districts seem as if arising and putting on new life--how intensely, how unutterably interesting! At such a crisis it seems as if the world itself were actually beginning to awake, as if the shock that had broken the slumbers of so many were about to shake the whole world together....

The history of the Church is full of these awakenings, some on a larger and some on a smaller scale. Indeed, such narratives form the true history of the Church, if we are to take our ideas of this from the inspired Church history given us in the Acts of the Apostles.

Many a wondrous scene has been witnessed from the day of Pentecost downwards to our own day, and what better deserves the attention and the study of the believer than the record of these outpourings of the Spirit? Besides the interest that cleaves to them there is much to be learned from them by the Church. To see how God has been working, and to observe the means and instruments by which He has carried on His work, cannot fail to be profitable and quickening. It makes us aware of our own shortcomings and it points out the way by which the blessing may be secured.

The Way God Works

As an illustration of how remarkably the work was of God and not of man, we quote without comment the following passages from A Narrative of Surprising Conversions by Jonathan Edwards [Related to the Revival in Northampton, Massachusetts beginning in 1737].

"It is observable how, at this remarkable day, a spirit of deep concern would seize upon persons. Some were in the house and some walking in the highway; some in the woods and some in the field; some in conversation and some in retirement; some children and some adults and some elderly persons. They would sometimes of a sudden be brought under the strongest impressions, from a sense of the great realities of the other world and eternal things.

"But such things, as far as I can learn, were usually, if not always, impressed upon men while they were in some way exercising their minds upon the Word of God or spiritual objects. For the most part, it has been under the public preaching of the Word that these lasting impressions have been fastened upon them.

"A great and earnest concern about the great things of religion and the eternal world, became universal in all parts of the town, and among persons of all degrees and all ages. The noise among the dry bones waxed louder and louder. All other talk but about spiritual and eternal things, was soon thrown off....

"The minds of people were wonderfully taken off from the world; it was treated among us as a thing of very little consequence. They seemed to follow their worldly business more as a part of their duty, than from any inclination they had to it....The only thing in their view was to get the kingdom of heaven, and everyone appeared to be pressing into it.

"The involvement of their hearts in this great concern could not be hid. It appeared in their very countenances. It was then a dreadful thing amongst us to be out of Christ, in danger every day of dropping into hell. What peoples' minds were intent upon was to escape for their lives and fly from the wrath to come!

"All would eagerly lay hold of opportunities for their souls, and would very often meet together in private houses for religious purposes. Such meetings, when appointed, were greatly thronged. There was scarcely a single person in the town, old or young, left unconcerned about the great things of eternity. Those who ordinarily were the most vain and the loosest and those who had been most disposed to think and speak lightly of vital and experimental religion, were now generally subject to great awakenings.

"The work of conversion was carried on in a most astonishing manner, and increased more and more. Souls did, as it were, come by flocks to Jesus Christ. From day to day, for many months together, might be seen evident instances of sinners brought out of darkness into marvelous light.

"Our public assemblies were then beautiful. The congregation was alive in God's service, every one earnest, intent on worship, every hearer eager to drink in the words of the minister as they came from his mouth. The assembly in general was, from time to time, in tears while the Word was preached, some weeping with sorrow and distress, others with joy and love, others with pity and concern for the souls of their neighbors....

"Those among us that had formerly been converted were greatly enlivened and renewed with fresh and extraordinary incomings of the Spirit of God, though some much more than others, according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Many who had before labored under difficulties about their own spiritual condition, had now their doubts removed by a more satisfying experience and more clear discoveries of God's love."

When man proceeds to the accomplishment of some mighty enterprise, he puts forth prodigious efforts, as if by the sound of his axes and hammers he would proclaim his own fancied might, and bear down opposing obstacles. He cannot work without sweat and dust and noise.

When God would do a marvelous work, such as may amaze all heaven and earth, He commands silence all around, sends for the still, small voice and then sets some feeble instrument to work and straightway it is done! Man toils and pants, and after all effects but little. The Creator, in the silent majesty of power, noiseless yet resistless, achieves by a word the infinite wonders of omnipotence!

In order to loose the bands of winter and bring in the fresh greenness of the pleasant spring, God does not send forth His angels to hew in pieces the thickened ice, or to strip off from the mountain's side the gathered snows or to plant anew over the face of the bleak earth, flowers fresh from His creating hand. No! He breathes from His lips a mild warmth into the frozen air, and forthwith, in stillness but in irresistible power, the work proceeds. The ice is shivered, the snows dissolve, the rivers resume their flow, the earth awakes as out of sleep, the hills and the valleys put on their freshening verdure, the fragrance of earth takes wing and fills the air, till a new world of beauty rises in silence amid the dissolution of the old!

Such is God's method of working, both in the natural and in the spiritual world--silent, simple, majestic and resistless! Such was the Reformation. Such were the revivals in Scotland under our fathers of the Covenant. Such was the Kirk o' Shotts on that memorable Pentecost, when the unstudied words of a timid and trembling youth carried salvation to five hundred souls.

Such was Ayr in its Pentecostal days, when from the lonely church at midnight, there were up to heaven the broken sighs of that man of prayer, John Welsh. And such was Northampton in later times, when Jonathan Edwards watched and prayed for its citizens, and when, from the prayer closet of that holy man, there went forth the living power that wrought such wonders there.

Is the Lord's hand shortened that it cannot save, or is His ear heavy that it cannot hear?

Arranged from True Revivals And The Men God Uses, by Horatius Bonar.