

SERMON IX.*

1 Thes. 5. 6.

Therefore let us not sleep, as do others—

I CAN spend no time in giving you a view of the context, which is very suitable to the words now read. They are a caution against security, and contain in them these two things. To wit, in the first place, a monitory prohibition of it; "Let us not sleep." And, secondly, a specification of the prohibited evil; "as do others:" which words plainly intimate that others sleeping is no warrant to us to do so. Common example indeed is apt to have that pernicious influence: but we are taught that it cannot justify us in sleeping, that others so generally, and as it were industriously, compose themselves to it. Moreover, these words signify, that others sleeping ought the more effectually to warn us not to do so. Examples that carry much of terror in them ought to strike our hearts with dread, and to possess us with a cautious prudent fear, lest we fall into the same dangerous and desperate state. It is as if he had said; "Come, let me shew you a fearful sight. Take a view

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of the world, cast your eyes round about on every side ; behold the generality of men all asleep, asleep under wrath, careless and at ease, securely slumbering while their judgment lingereth not, and while their destruction doth not slumber : be warned by so dreadful an example not to do, as they do."

The words do not need much of literal explication. Sleep is wont to be variously taken. You know what it means in the proper sense. In the borrowed sense it sometimes signifies, natural death ; sometimes a quiet composure, and rest of the spirit : " I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep ; for the Lord only maketh me dwell in safety." Ps. 4. 8. 127. 2. Again, that is, in a moral sense, it signifies the state of sin : " Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead ; and Christ shall give thee light." Eph. 5. 14. It denotes especially the security of such a state, with reference to the wrath and judgment of God, whether temporal or eternal ; which sleep is always sinful, and in some cases penal too in some degree : for we read of a pouring forth a spirit of slumber, and a deep sleep. Isa. 29. 10. Rom. 11. 8. But we must know that the word *καθευδωμεν*, here used in the text, signifies a deeper or a more intense sleep. It is the word that is used by the Septuagint to signify the sleep of death. " Many that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake." Dan. 12. 2. And they use the same word to express that fast sleep of the prophet Jonah, out of which all the storms and perils of the sea were not sufficient to awaken him. As for the words *us*, and *others* ; the former plainly means true sincere christians, and the latter the rest of the world : the refuse, as the word *λοιποι* emphatically signifies ; or the reprobate, and worst of men. Two things offer themselves to us from the words, namely—that these *others*, the refuse who are the most of men do sleep : and—that God's own people by no means ought to do so. I shall speak to these two things : And,

I. Shew you, that these *others*, here referred to by the apostle, do sleep : And,

II. Upon what accounts it so very ill becomes the people of God to do so too. And then,

III. I shall make the use of both together.

I. I am to shew that the *others*, whom the text means, do sleep. And herein I must premise to you, before we come to evince this point, that by sleeping is not merely meant, that they do actually for the present sleep only ; as if the apostle supposed them to be but in some present temporary slumber : but we are to understand him as speaking of them as habitual

sleepers; or that they are under such a sort of sleeping disease, as is resembled by a lethargy; or a *caros*, which is reckoned a more intense degree of that disease; a *veternum*, or dead sleep. How physicians distinguish these things, or critics, I need not stay to tell you. But the thing that is plainly meant hereby is to represent this as the common state of the world, that it is an habitual drowsiness, such as that kind of disease serves to resemble.

Now that this is the common state of most of the world, we may evince to you by such things, as are usually incident to sleep; or are symptoms of a sleepy, sluggish disposition. As,

1. Forgetfulness, which has most proper reference to things past. Sleepy persons are very oblivious. So is the common case of the world. Men are forgetful of things they are most concerned to remember, and most forgetful of them. They have generally forgot that they are creatures; have forgot that with the rest of men they are lapsed, and revolted from their Creator, and become sinners; forgot that they sprung from an apostate race, and that they were children of wrath, one as well as another. Thus their strange forgetfulness of things, which one would think should continually urge them, shews that they are continually asleep.

2. Insensibleness, or stupidity, which hath reference to what is present. Persons that are in a more intense and deep sleep, you cannot make them feel without difficulty. Such as are in a *caros*, prick them and they do not feel. Sleep is a binding of the senses, and such a deep sleep strongly binds them. So the common case is with the world. It is a wonder of divine power if at any time their hearts are made to feel; and a thing to be recorded (as you find it is in the Acts of the Apostles, chap. 2. 37.) if any are ever pricked in their heart, though never so pungent things are spoken to them.

3. Security; or unapprehensiveness of any future threatening danger. Why, so you know the case is with persons asleep. Let the danger be never so near, as well as dreadful; if the house be on fire, if the murderer be by the bed-side, if the sword be at the breast, the knife at the throat, yet they are void of all fear. And do not we know this to be the common case with the world? Destruction from the Almighty is no terror to them. They rush with all violence upon every danger, as a horse into the battle: or are like persons in their nocturnals; who, if not hindered, would come upon rocks, precipices, or rivers, or fall into dangers that would certainly destroy them. Another thing incident to sleep is,

4. Misapprehension of all things past, present, or to come. For you know in sleep persons use to dream, and then how strangely do they misapprehend things? their heads are full of false images, or false conceptions of those things which are true. The case is so with the world too in their sleep. They can tell how to dis-imagine all the greatest realities, and turn them into shadows. God and Christ, heaven and hell, and the eternal judgment, which must determine them to the one or the other of these, are all fancies with them. But the pomp and grandeur of this world, which is called fancy;* the business and turmoils of it, which are all walking in a vain shew; outward prosperity, which is but as a dream when one awakes: these things are great realities, and with them these are the main things, and the most important. Riches and poverty, prosperity and adversity, which will be all thought fancies in a little while, are great things with these men; so aptly do they misapprehend in their dreams!

5. There is also (which is near a-kin to the last) a great unaptness to reflect upon any thing as absurd, though never so truly so, which occurs to them in this dreaming sleepy state. It is so with persons, you know, in dreams. Let things occur to them never so absurd, they never take notice of the absurdity. Let them dream themselves to be in never such odd, antic postures, all is well; they find no fault with any thing they do, or is done to them, while they are in their slumbers. And so is the case with the world too. The most absurd things imaginable, are no absurdities to them. To live in this world of God's making, while he feeds them with breath from moment to moment, yet as "without God in the world;" to be concerned a great deal more to please themselves than him, as if his favour were of no importance, and signified nothing; to study more the satisfaction of their flesh, than the saving of their souls; busying themselves all their days about mere trifles: these, I say, the most absurd things that ever could enter into any human imagination so much as to think of, are yet no absurdities to them. They find no fault with this; think all is well, though this be their continued course, which plainly shews they are asleep. Those things, for which persons when awake are ready to tear their flesh, and do abhor and loath themselves for, they indulge themselves even for a life's time, making no displeasing reflections upon them all their days; never at least till they awake, which shews what their state was before.

* Agrippa and Bernice came *μετα πολλης φαντασιας*. Acts. 25. 23.

6. It is especially incident to a deeper sleep to be awakened with very great difficulty. The difficulty of bringing them to a right mind, to the exercise of their understanding, and to apply themselves to do according as a rectified understanding would dictate, shews them to be very much under the power of sleep, since there is so much ado to awaken them. And yet nothing will serve some, who are called upon by the word of God from heaven, even all their time, and yet never awake; roused by strange thunders of providence, many times, yet awake not.

7. Slothfulness is manifestly ascribed to such a sleepy distemper, or a listlessness to business. So it is with the world too. That which is the proper business of men, in this world, they will not be got to it; they are altogether indisposed thereunto. You know how Solomon represents the sluggard whose hands refuse to labour and indulges himself in sleep and slumbers. Prov. 6. 9, 10. 21. 25. 24. 30—34. Again,

8. They are apt to shew great displeasure, and forwardness towards those, who attempt to awaken them. So it is with very drowsy persons, who soon grow peevish and angry if you offer to awaken them. They are ready to quarrel even with the very light itself, if it shine in their faces. Thus it is with the sleepy world too. This very light itself is as the shadow of death, and whatsoever it is that tends to awaken them.

9. And lastly, there is a constant proneness to fall asleep again, if at any time they are startled a little. Thus it is with the world. You may have here and there persons who are roused to bestir themselves a little, but presently they drop asleep again. They can hold their eyes open but a little while. And thus I have shewn what is the common state of the world, these "others;" they are generally asleep. I now come to shew,

II. That it ill becomes those who are God's own children, that is, true sincere christians, to sleep as do others; namely the refuse of the world. This will appear upon a threefold account: it holds no agreement, either with their principles, or with their state, or with their design and end.

1. It is very unsuitable to their principles that they should sleep as do others; to the constituent principles of the new creature. As for instance,

(1.) Light is a main ingredient principle in that holy frame of the new creation. New creatures are all the children of God, as God is the Father of lights. They are born light, of light. It is true, light signifies holiness; not directly and formally, but consequentially, as being potently influential and

efficacious. It derives, or makes an impression upon the heart which is correspondent, and agreeable to itself. The apostle tells these Thessalonians, that they are the children of the light and of the day. 1 Thess. 5. 5. It is day with them. It is not only day round about them (so it is wherever the gospel is afforded to men) but God hath made it day within; or, as the apostle expresses it, hath shined in our hearts. 2 Cor. 4. 6: A day-star is risen there; and to lie sleeping under the light of such a day, is a very unsuitable thing. They have light whereby to discern, both the mysteries of grace, and the methods of providence; and very unsuitable it is in both respects that they should sleep. They have light to discern the mysteries of grace; those strange and wonderful things unfolded in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, which should always hold the soul in an admiring posture, for it is a marvellous light they are brought into, 1. Pet. 2. 9. or an amazing light as the word signifies. (*ἄνευμαστον φως*.) And they have light more than other men to discern the methods of divine providence. The Lord's voice crieth to the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name. Micah 6. 9. There is that wisdom which is of heavenly descent, wisdom from above, by which they know what is the nature of God, and what are the ways of God, which are highly conformable to his nature, in his government of the world. It is not likely these should be asleep, when comparing things together; especially when they expect God will be doing some strange matter on the earth: though, at some times, the appearances thereof are greater than at others, and things seem near even at the door. If they be so, they who have not internal light cannot apprehend it: but those who have enlightened eyes may, especially at some times, see that the providence of God is bringing it to pass. It is unreasonable then such should be asleep, who are not in darkness, lest the day should overtake them as a thief; as the expression is in the fifth chapter of this epistle and the fourth verse. And again,

(2.) It is unsuitable to the principle of life and power in the new creature. They are made to live by the most agile and noble kind of life that is in the world, and to which sleepiness is most disagreeable. They are made to give themselves unto God: as those that are alive unto him, and gotten out of death, wherein they were sleeping before. They are to reckon themselves indeed dead to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Rom. 6. 11. I might also mention those three eminent principles of faith, love and hope, all directed to action; but the time will not permit.

2 For sincere christians to sleep as do others is very unsuit-

able to their state. As in the ninth verse of this chapter the apostle observes, that God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. By which he intimates, that the refuse part of the world have the tokens on them of persons appointed unto wrath; while those, who are true and sincere are appointed to obtain salvation. And,

3. It is unsuitable to their designs and ends. They who have so great things to do, as to serve and glorify God all their time in this world, and to save their own immortal souls, and to gain an immortal state of life and glory; methinks should have no time to sleep. It would be altogether unsuitable to their business to allow themselves so to do. But I cannot insist further here, and shall pass on,

III. To the use of this subject. And sundry things these truths taken together would yield us by way of inference, for our improvement. As,

1. That God's own people, and the men of this world, are two distinct sorts of people. They are *alii, atque alii*. "Let not us sleep, as do others." It would be a very useful consideration to us many times to think seriously of this matter, that there are two sorts of people in the world; and then to think seriously also to which I must annumerate myself, or to which sort I belong.

2. The people of God are a select and a saved people, the rest are a refuse people. This is plainly too held forth to us. Christians are a faithful, chosen generation, and possession; the others are not so, but are of a vile and abject sort. All indeed were naturally alike; but they who are taken out and selected, are made a very peculiar sort of people, in their habitual frame, and in respect of the permanent fixed excellencies that are in them, above and beyond what are to be found in other men.

3. The people of God are not to imitate the rest of the world. "Let not us sleep as do others." They are a peculiar and a different people from these "others;" and therefore must do other kind of things. "What do ye more than others?" said our Lord to his disciples, upon a supposition, that they should only do so and so; or content themselves with going no further than the Scribes and Pharisees: but this absurdity is implied at the bottom, that for them to do no more than others were a most intolerable thing. Our Saviour there reasons *ex absurdo*, and supposes it very absurd that his disciples should do no more than others. They are not to be conformed to this world; not to run with others into the same excess of riot, though they

·speak never so ill of them for their singularity. 1 Pet. 4. 4. We may further learn,

4. That it is not enough for the people of God to abstain from the positive evils of these others, but they must beware also of their neglects. Many think that they do fairly well, that they are not guilty of those gross commissions that many other men are ; but do not tax themselves for being guilty of their neglects, carelessness, sleepiness, sloth and security. But alas ! we are not to sleep with others, to be ommissive with them of what is incumbent upon us to do.

Well, that I may hasten to a close, this truth ought to be awakening to us all, and should put us upon rousing ourselves. What ! is the world asleep about us ? and do we profess to be of another sort from them, and yet sleep with them ? Surely it highly becomes us to bestir ourselves, and to shake off this drowsy temper. If I had time I would shew in some particulars, how pernicious and mischievous a drowsy sluggish temper of spirit is to a christian. While he sleeps, corruption grows. " I went by (says Solomon) the field of the sluggard, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding (the sleepy person is a fool and a witless person) and it was all grown over with thorns." Prov. 24. 30. Temptation prevails ; " Watch and pray therefore, that ye enter not into temptation." Mat. 26. 41. Where there is no watching, but continual sleeping, temptation carrieth all before it. Grace languisheth, and cannot but do so hereupon. Comforts fail, we cannot so much as taste them ; much less can we fetch them from the proper objects which would afford them. While we sleep providences are unobserved. A great deal of instruction is to be got out of them, and much duty lies upon us in reference to them. But while we sleep, we take no notice of whatever God does in the world. The breathings of the Spirit also are neglected ; for they do not always quite awaken, though they do in a degree. It looks to be complied, and comported with by our stirring up ourselves to meet with it. The divine presence is hereupon withdrawn ! Christ is gone ! How many good times are lost when our doors are knocked at, and we asleep ! Is it not often so ? Duties stand for little ! all most slumberingly performed ! in a slight, listless, heartless manner ; as we do every thing, when we are between sleeping and waking. Either there is no calling upon God, or it is to no purpose. It is a dreadful thing to sleep upon the knee. There must be a stirring up of ourselves to take hold upon God, and a watching unto prayer. With what wakeful, lively spirits should we attend at the Lord's table ! but if we indulge our-

selves in this sleepy distemper, so it will be even there too. Our eternal states are hazarded! Are we sure we have done all that is requisite, in order to the securing of them? If we had done ever so much, we should be less for sleeping. While the bridegroom tarried, all slumbered and slept; the wise as well as the foolish virgins; but the wise had their oil, and their lamps ready trimmed; but the foolish had not. He comes, and then the door was shut, and they were shut out. They were not ready, they had slept away their time. Matt. 25. 1—13. We make ourselves by this means liable to the surprisal of judgments. And is not that terrible to our thoughts, to think of being caught asleep, when God comes to plead in his displeasure with the inhabitants of the earth? I am afraid this would be the too common case among those who bear the name of christians, and is so now while God's judgments are abroad in the world. And I wish it may not be the case of many of those, who go for stricter professors among us, to be so surprised as the old world was. But certainly it will be inexcusable in us to do so who have had such warnings. We do not know that the old world had from Noah more express warnings than we have had. It is recorded as one part of his encomium, that "By faith he being warned of God, moved with fear, prepared the ark." Heb. 11. 7. We have been warned, I do not know how we have been moved. But sure we are very much without excuse, if we are without fear and care upon such warnings as we have had. For what! would we expect voices from heaven? or must God send prophets among us, or else we will regard nothing? Needs it be proclaimed, that within so many days, we and our city shall be destroyed? Surely we have so much understanding as to compare the way of God's dispensation in former times, when the case has been as it is with us; and to make a comparison between the former, and the present case, in respect of wickedness and provocation! we may then see how we are to make the comparison, in respect of God's judgments.

I know there are pretences for security; and things do very obviously suggest themselves to the thoughts of many, by which they put off or prevent what there is of an awakening tendency in the judgments of God. And perhaps it may be said: "Why, to what purpose would it be for us to be so wakeful, and apprehensive of such and such fearful things coming on? we cannot prevent them by that." But that is more than you know. You do not know but that most serious importunate seeking of the face of God, jointly and separately, in congregations, and families, and closets; being much upon the knee, much with

God in private; may prevent a great deal: you do not know how much it may prevent of the divine displeasure. But if you do not by this means prevent the common calamity, is it not much to save your own soul? And though you be not hid in the common calamity, is it not a desirable thing to die accepted with God?

But if you still say, To what purpose is it? I answer, Not to that purpose, that we should torment ourselves with the forethought. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. Matt. 6. 34. This is not the meaning of God in requiring us to be watchful; nor that we should put ourselves upon the trial or use of any undue means, for the securing ourselves from external calamity. It is not, I say, to that purpose neither. But, positively, we have a great deal to do and a great deal we might do if we be awake, if we be not found asleep, when any wasting desolating judgment comes. We may be drawing near to God. Is it not better that judgments take us near to God, than afar off? We may be entering into our chambers; we may be making our calling, and election sure; clearing up our title to the eternal inheritance; labouring to get such graces in actual exercise, as are suitable unto such a time, and such a state of things: to be prompt and ready to know how to use our faith and patience and not to be as those who know not how to use their hands, when the time for action cometh.

Finally. We may be contemplating the heavenly state; recounting with ourselves, that it is happy for us we are sure of happiness above: endeavouring to frame our hearts to an indifference, as to all sublunary things and enjoyments, ready to lose all and be undone. These are things we know not how to digest, without preparation. And to have these things snatched away, before our hearts are loosened from them, will be the way to pluck our hearts away too. But we should be crucified to the world, and have the world crucified to us. Then we are unconcerned with one another. Dead men lie quietly one by another, give one another no more wounds. And certainly it is better to be taken in such a posture as this, when judgment comes, than to be found in all these respects altogether unprepared.

And whereas it may be said: "But why should we so concern ourselves; why should not we rest in peace and quietness? We have apprehended danger a great many times before to be very near us, but God has kept it off. He is able to keep us still." And this I am most troubled at of all, that this should be used as a kind of religious pretence for security, "God is able to keep off any threatening danger."

The doctrine is true, but grossly misapplied. Did never any storm befall the church of God yet? and what! was not God as able to have kept it off then? We should consider with ourselves. Is it, according to the aspects of providence, and God's ordinary methods before, likely that it should be kept off? How can we but think there is a day coming of God's reckoning with a people of such provocations as we are? What! are we more innocent than our neighbours, weltering in blood, and in great desolation, round about us? Nor do I think our danger is so much from incensed enemies abroad (for we hear of wars, and rumours of wars among our neighbours) as from the security of our own hearts. We have not so much reason to fear their arms, as we have a slumbering spirit in our own bosoms.

But if these threatened evils be yet kept off, what are we the worse for being prepared? We lose no labour. It is worth our labour to be prepared to live or die, for good days and bad. We have been only doing, what is our duty at all times. We should be always watching; for we know not when our Lord will come and call us. Therefore we have no reasonable pretence why we should indulge ourselves to sloth, and say; "Yet a little more sleep, and yet a little more." No, no; there has been a great deal too much already.
