

"IT'S TIME TO WAKE UP"

On one fateful evening, during a drunken feast in the city of Babylon, the finger of God appeared and wrote on the wall some words that were foreign to the revelers. When Daniel was called in to interpret the writing he told the grandson of the great king Nebuchadnezzar – Belshazzar – that he had “been weighed on the scales and found deficient” (Daniel 5:27). On the night king was killed and his kingdom fell to the Medes and the Persians.

Have you ever considered what God would write today if He were warning his people? Of course, it would be folly to speculate. We have no idea what He would write. But I think that I know what I would be tempted to write if I should be asked to write a sentence upon the meeting house walls all over the world. I would write, “It's Time To Wake Up.” Paul wrote, words similar to this in Romans 13. While encouraging the saints to, “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law” (Romans 13:8) he went on to say:

(Romans 13:10-11) Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. {11} Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.

This would certainly be an appropriate message to write on the walls of this or any other meetinghouse – awake from your sleep, “for now salvation is nearer to us than we believed.”

I have heard that there used to be a Missouri farmer who would call his four sons very early Monday morning with these words: “Hurry! Today's Monday, tomorrow's Tuesday, the next day's Wednesday and the week is half gone and nothing is done yet.” Today we might urge: “This is 2003, soon it will be 2004 and the next year will be 2005, the first decade of this millennium is half over and yet so little has been done!” We need to wake up dear brethren, ...

- Wake Up To Needs of Lost Souls

F Teaching those who have never known the Lord

How can one fulfill this royal law to love his neighbor and remain silent about the Jesus? For without Christ no one will be saved – not even that kindly woman down the road who goes to mass every day, not even her. Without faith in Jesus men and women all over this world will die in their sins (John 8:21-24). But as Paul says in Romans 10: “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?” Brethren, unless they hear the pure unadulterated gospel of Jesus they cannot live!

It is time that we awake to the necessity of saving the lost by proclaiming the gospel to them. Think of the millions in China, in Russia, in Africa, Asia and Europe who are living in darkness because they know not Jesus. Now turn your eyes to this country. On the eastern seaboard there are millions and millions of souls – LOST souls who have yet to hear the unadulterated gospel of the Son of God and many thousands of these souls live within just a few miles of this meetinghouse. As the song truthfully says: There IS much to do, there's work on every hand.

On a regular basis we hear the great commission: "Go ...make disciples of all the nations" (Matt 28:19). "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). We hear Jesus as he speaks to the apostles:

(Matthew 9:37-38) ... "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. {38} Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

Then, in keeping with these Biblical injunctions we sing songs exhorting each other to send the light and telling us that the gospel is for all. Songs urging us to...

"Spread the tidings 'round, wherever man is found, wherever human hearts and human woes abound; let every Christian tongue proclaim the joyful sound: Our Lord is Lord of Lord" (F. Bottome, O Spread The Tiding 'Round, # 14).

And...

"Arise, the Master calls for thee, the harvest days are here! No longer sit with folded hand, but gather far and near ...

"Go seek the lost and erring ones, who never knew the Lord; go lead them from the ways of sin, and thou shalt have reward ...

"The message bear to distant lands beyond the rolling sea; go tell them of a Savior's love — the Lamb of Calvary. Arise, the Master calls for thee! Salvation full and free proclaim, till every kindred, tribe and tongue exalt the Savior's name.

"Arise! Arise! The Master calls for thee, arise! Arise! A faithful reaper be, arise! The field is white and days are going by, awake, awakes and answer 'Here am I!'" (Mary Brown, Harvest Time, # 404)

Brethren are we as individuals and as a congregation awake to this call? Do we hear the Lord saying: "Go ...make disciples of all the nations"? "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"? Are we awake to the songs that we sing to each other exhorting us to preach the gospel, to proclaim the name of Jesus to throughout the community? Or, do we just like to hear ourselves sing? Oh, that the words of the great commission and these evangelistic songs sting our lips and burn our tongue every time we quote and sing them until we finally act upon them.

When will we awake to the vision of Jesus who said to his hard-hearted apostles, "lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest" (John 4:35)? All around us there are individuals who are interested in spiritual things but who are traveling the wrong road. They are your friends, your neighbors, your workmates, your housekeeper, the parents of your children's best friends. They are your family members. They are your teachers (students!). Peter's wife, Lauren, converted help lead her music teacher at her high school to the Lord even while she was his student. Brethren, look around you for there are opportunities on every side.

"Far and near the fields are teaming with the wave of ripened grain; far and near their gold is gleaming o'er the sunny slope and plain.

And after we pray to the Lord of harvest to send forth reapers, we need to respond to His call for reapers with the words of Isaiah: "Here am I. Send me!" (Isa 6:8).

We need to wake up to the call to make disciples of all nations and to preach the gospel to every creature. Can we even make the claim to be an apostolic church if we don't wake up to this call?

F Admonishing those who are still in the process of turning from the Lord

But as we awake to the call to proclaim the gospel to those who have never known the Lord, we must also awake to the need of our brethren who are unruly, fainthearted and weak

(1 Thessalonians 5:14) We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

We have an obligation to our brethren to help them to be faithful! But no one enjoys being told he is wrong or being warned about something he is doing. Some people become even more stubborn when they are warned. But Christians should both expect and appreciate warnings and exhortations that are given from God's word by sincere people who are more advanced in the faith than they are. Several verses before this Paul had urged these brethren (5:12) to "appreciate (lit., to know) those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction (admonition)." Now he is instructing them that they too needed to be involved in...

- Admonishing the undisciplined or unruly.

The Greek word means "disorderly, out of the ranks (often so of soldiers), irregular." Christians have been given orders as to how they must act while living in the world. These orders came from their Commander and Chief through his apostles. We must listen to them if we are to be in fellowship with the Lord (1 John 1:3; 4:6). Too many Christians, however – even in apostolic days – walk out of step with apostolic teaching. Those who are in step are told to "admonish" – warn and seriously advise – these brethren.

- Encouraging the fainthearted

But then, perhaps to guard against having too strict a disciplinarian spirit, the apostles admonishes these admonishers to encourage the fainthearted, to help the weak and to be patient with all. The AV says feeble-minded for fainthearted. Because feeble-mindedness is with being mentally weak, it is not a good translation for our age. The apostle is not speaking about people who are mentally deficient, but who are easily discouraged. They are the timid ones, those easily discouraged by persecutions, or cast down by trouble. Paul does not say that we are to condone this, but we are to encourage such people – we are to hold up their hands so that they can continue to do what is right. The Spirit gave a similar admonishment in Heb 12:12-13.

Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, {13} and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

- Helping the weak

We are to encourage the fainthearted and help the weak. The idea behind this admonishment is that we are to "stick with the weak," hold the weak firmly to you. The law of the jungle says that the weak shall perish and only the fittest survive. The law of Christ is that the strong shall support the weak.

(Romans 15:1) Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves.

Every congregation has people in it who are weak in knowledge, trust, courage, and strength. Let us stick to these people and support them until they become strong and can uphold others.

- Being patient with all

Finally, Paul tells them to be “patient.” The Greek word means to “persevere patiently and bravely in enduring misfortunes and troubles; to be patient in bearing the offences and injuries of others; to be mild and slow in avenging.” (Thayer) It is the very opposite of being exasperated, short tempered, and despairing. It takes a lot of long-suffering and patience before some of the children of God develop into the kind of people they should be. But as it is written in 1 Cor 13:4, one of the attributes of loving our neighbor and/or brother is that we be patient with him.

Brethren, are we awake to this admonition with regard to our struggling brother and sisters? Or do we come to each assembly in our own little world, ignoring their plight —or are we even aware of their plight? Do we know who these brethren are? I encourage us all each week to look around and see who is or who isn't here. What do we do with that information? Do we email them a word of encouragement, write them cards, phone them or do we do nothing. Do we seek to have them into our homes where we can get to know them better. Are we awake to this responsibility? Can we even consider ourselves faithful Christians if we are not fulfilling our responsibility in this matter?

F Restoring those who have already turned aside from following the Lord

Sadly, some of these weak brethren will turn away from the Lord. Are we awake to the responsibility that God has given toward them when this happens? The scripture says:

(Galatians 6:1) Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

(James 5:19-20) My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, {20} let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

James is referring speaking of the sinning Christian. He is not speaking of someone who has sinned and has already repented. Nor is he speaking of someone who is sinning and has never been a Christian. He is speaking of the Christian who has strayed from the truth and is now a sinner. If he is not converted, he is in danger of eternal death. The blood of Christ no longer covers his sins because he has departed from Christ. His condition is desperate for his soul is in as much danger as the one who has never known the Lord Jesus.

The cause of this man's rejection of the blood of Christ is indicated by the expression “strays from the truth.” He has either deceived himself or has been deceived until now he no longer believes nor follows the plain teaching of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. He knows to do good, but is not doing it. He knows the teaching of Christ, but has departed from it. Not only has he departed in heart, but he has departed in deed. He needs to be converted from the “error of his way.”

Since I arrived in Tyngsboro a number of souls have “strayed from the truth,” a number have turned aside from the Lord. And I know that before our arrival there were a number who left too. Some of these have simply disappeared — we never see them. But there are

others whom we see on a regular basis, almost weekly. Do we speak with them each time that we see them about their soul's condition? Do we remind them of the Lord whom they have left? Are we awake to their desperate condition and our responsibility to save them?

But if you say to me: Kieran, I have spoken to them, but they don't want to hear; they have specifically asked me to quit speaking with them. If that be the case, then why are we still seeing them on a social basis. Don't you want their salvation? In such situations the Lord requires of us desperate measures. Or haven't you read the scripture that instructs you to stop socializing with our brethren who no longer desire to walk in the light?

(1 Corinthians 5:11) But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one.

(2 Thessalonians 3:14-15) And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame. {15} And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

Brethren, we need to wake up to our responsibilities to our brethren who have strayed. Furthermore, we need to trust that the Lord knows what he is talking about when he says that we must quit associating with them when they refuse to obey the Lord that He knows what is best when it comes to restoring them to His fold.

- We must wake up to these responsibilities or

When Jesus had John write to the church at Sardis He said:

(Revelation 3:1-6) ...“I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. {2} Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. {3} Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you. {4} But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. {5} He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels. {6} He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Brethren, we need to wake up to what the Lord expects of us in these areas – we all do, myself included. Each one of us needs to be involved in teaching the lost, admonishing unruly and encouraging the fainthearted. Each one of us needs to seek to restore those brethren who have turn back to the word. This is not only the responsibility of the preacher and the elders –we all have a share in this matter! Are we awake? Are you listening?

- Let Me Write It on Your Heart

2004 is upon us and the next year is 2005, the first decade if this millennium is half over and yet so little has been done! And since I cannot write this on the walls of our meetinghouse please allow me to write it in your mind just now. Christian, WAKE UP! The welfare of the cause of Christ is in our hands. With God's help we can do everything He expects us to do. We are commissioned to “preach the word,” we are commanded to encourage each other and we are encouraged to restore the erring. We are God's hands, His mouth, His means. If we are asleep, truth will be stifled. If we will wake up, truth will continue to win.