

401 Asleep on a pillow

Most of us will spend a quarter or more of our whole lives asleep, so sleep matters, it is worth taking seriously!

In God's Word, we see first of all that sleep is one of God's precious blessings upon us. Sleep is a time when we are vulnerable and oblivious to all else, so we simply have to trust in the Lord, to let go, to commit ourselves and those in our prayers into His hands as we prepare to sleep: "Into thy hands O Lord I commend my spirit ... I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety ... he giveth his beloved sleep ... my sleep was sweet unto me" (from Luke 23.46 / Psalms 4.8 & 127.2 / Jeremiah 31.26 (KJV)). Of course calm sleep comes more easily if during our waking hours we have been walking with the Lord as we should so walk (eg., Proverbs 3.21-24 concerning our "departing not" from the Lord's wisdom and knowledge).

These thoughts of trust and dependence before we sleep are expressed in the prayers of the old, late-evening service of "Compline", as in, "The Lord almighty grant us a quiet night and a perfect end ... Save us Lord, while we are awake; guard us while we are asleep; that awake we may watch with Christ, and asleep may rest in his peace ... Visit this house, we pray you, O Lord; drive far from it all the snares of the enemy; may your holy angels dwell with us and guard us in peace; and may your blessing be always upon us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen".

With such sentiments and words, in our giving thanks to the Lord we do indeed "show forth His loving kindness in the morning as we awake, and His faithfulness every night" (from Psalm 92.1-2).

Next we learn of God making use of "deep sleep" on several occasions in the Bible, especially when He had a particular work to do, for instance with Adam, in His forming of Eve (Genesis 2.21-25); and with Abram in His making of the covenant (Genesis 15.12-21).

At times God uses our dreams when we are asleep to speak very clearly into situations. Biblical precedents include with Jacob when granting His promises regarding the land and Jacob's seed (Genesis 28.11-22); with Joseph, regarding Joseph and his family (Genesis 37.5-11 & 45.4-15), and then later with Pharaoh, through Joseph (Genesis 41); with Nebuchadnezzar, through Daniel (Daniel 2 & 4.4-37 – two crucial biblical prophecies still of great relevance for today); with Daniel himself (Daniel 7; and Chapters 8 & 9 (two visions rather than dreams, 9.20-27 being

one of the most significant biblical prophecies of them all, that is yet to be completed); and with Daniel again, in a deep sleep, (Daniel 10.9).

In our pre-sleep prayers we can ask for God's authority over our dreams, and in the morning it can be helpful to jot down any remembered dreams. Even though on first waking dreams may seem meaningless (eg., Ecclesiastes 5.7), a written record of them allows for any significant themes and patterns to be discerned within them over a period of time; these in turn can be brought before the Lord, perhaps for His guidance or His healing.

Sometimes of course we just cannot sleep (egs., Esther 6.1 / Daniel 2.1 (Nebuchadnezzar) & 6.18 (Darius, while Daniel was probably sleeping soundly among the lions!)), which can make any problems in our lives seem even worse, as in Psalm 6.6. But such times can become a blessing. The Lord Himself never slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121.4), so even in the dark hours we are still in His loving presence. In the stillness we can rehearse God's promises in word and song, silently or aloud, knowing that He is God (a host of examples! - Psalms 1.2; 4.4; 16.7; 17.3; 46.10; 77.6; 97.12b; 139.7-12 / Matthew 28.20 / Romans 8.35-39 / Hebrews 13.5b). We praise Him for His mercies, and lift our simple prayers to His throne of grace (egs., Hebrews 4.14-16 / Luke 2.37 / I Timothy 5.5b / II Timothy 1.3). Often it is in these hours of darkness that the Lord does speak particularly clearly, and we are more able to hear Him clearly, as young Samuel found (I Samuel 3.1-18).

We can close this time with the simple picture of Jesus out on the lake that night in "a great storm of wind ... the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full ... and he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow" (from Mark 4.37-41, KJV). Jesus was soundly asleep in the midst of the storm, and He ticked them off when they woke Him up! What an example for the rest of us.

Praise God, as the old chorus puts it, "With Jesus in the boat we can smile at the storm" - whatever the hour of day or night.

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