

SLEEPING IN THE MIDNIGHT HOUR

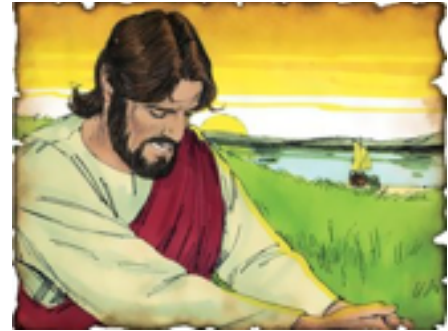
“On the alert” should describe the Church of Christ in today’s world. Yet, we are urged to “take it easy” – “relax” – “enjoy the good life”.

Even some words to Jesus, taken out of context, might sound like an invitation to inactive discipleship. The words which should not be taken out of context are:

Mark 14:41: “Sleep on now, and take your rest.”

Do these words sound soothing? They are — so long as you do not read the rest of the story.

It is the Garden of Gethsemane, beyond the brook of Kedron, at the foot of the Mount of Olives – about half mile from the eastern walls of Jerusalem. It is nearing the midnight hour on the Tuesday night before the crucifixion. Jesus, facing immediate arrest, trial, and execution, had gone there to pray. Eleven disciples went with Him. All but three stayed near the gate. The three (Peter, James, and John) had gone further into the Garden with Him and were instructed to watch and pray. Jesus knew the power of prayer!



Jesus went alone, still further into the garden, “about a stone’s throw”.

Luke 22:41: And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed.

He wanted communion with God.



At this time, Jesus was taking upon Himself the burden of the world’s sin. We believe this, yet it is impossible for us to have a complete understanding of this suffering. It is too much!

It was not fear of the coming physical suffering that oppressed the Master. The oppression came from satan’s seeking to destroy Him before the Cross by

strangulation. While He combated the powers of darkness, His disciples proved of little help.

After Jesus' time of fervent prayer:

Mark 14:37-38:

37 And He cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour?

38 Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.

They only had recently been at the Lord's table. They had been impressed with the event about to take place in the life of their Lord. **If a drowsy spirit could overtake men like these at a time like this, how much more do we need to be on guard that our prayer life remains constant and fervent!**



Jesus awakened them and again told them to be vigilant. Even in His own agony and dread, He understood the frailty of His disciples and, in compassion, said, "***The spirit is truly willing, but***

the flesh is weak."

This happened a second time. Jesus woke them up again. They didn't know what to say. They were embarrassed, and yet Luke tells us something very touching about the inner circle there. They slept "for sorrow" — or, as we might say, "They cried themselves to sleep".

The third time He prayed, He again found them sleeping. His words, "***Sleep on now, and take your rest***", startled them awake! They had failed Him again. Now their opportunity was gone.



What power comes from prayer! Jesus was calm and confident throughout the following ordeal, whereas the disciples were confused and afraid. Jesus met the soldiers and protected His disciples; the disciples fled in a state of panic. Circumstances were not changed, but the terror Jesus had met was

replaced with assurance of God's actual Presence; and with this relationship, He is strong.

God always gives His children power to stand, to overcome, or to endure when they seek His Will in faith, believing. He calls us to "watch and pray" in our present circumstances.

Watch! "**Take heed that no man deceive you.**" In these chaotic days, pray — and watch out for those who lead you away from God's Word and Will.

Watch! Always do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Pray for His Spirit to enable you to fulfill this command.

Watch! Be careful how you think of others. Pray that you do not take it on yourself to judge anyone.

Watch! Don't let your chief goal in life become the abundance of things you possess, the vacations you can take, the easy life.

Watch! Don't fall into the temptation to give, only to be seen of men.

Watch! Above all – watch for His soon return!

Luke 12:37: Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.

There are many signs of His Coming, and we have been told plainly, and often, in His own Word – the Scriptures – to: **Watch and Pray**. How awful to have Him come and find us sleeping and to hear His reproach, "**Sleep on**", knowing our opportunity to serve Him in this world is gone!

Three experts on the subject speak to us:

Peter, one who slept instead of watching at Gethsemane, realized how tragic it would be for those who found sleeping on the Day when He returns.

2 Peter 3:17: Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.

James, another once-drowsy disciple, wrote:

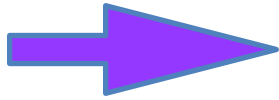
James 5:8: Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the Coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

John, who also remembered being caught sleeping when he should have been watching and praying, wrote down the words of the Lord as they came later in Revelation:

Revelation 3:3, 11:

³ Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

¹¹ Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.



The best way to “watch” is to be in an attitude of constant prayer, and to have a sincere willingness to do His Will in all things.

Will you be lulled into thinking there is no rush to prepare for His Coming? Will you let worldly desires and goals distract you? Or, will you be among those who expectantly, prayerfully, hopefully, watch for His Appearing, and say:

Revelation 22:20: He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

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