

"Watch and Pray"

Being alert can be very important at times. If you don't look both ways before you cross the street, it can be a deadly mistake. If you fall asleep while driving, it can cost you your life. If you don't read the safety precautions before taking certain medications, you can get very sick. Being alert can be very important.

When the Messiah tells you to be alert about something, it's probably pretty important. Jesus in this passage tells three of his disciples to be on guard. He tells them to "Watch and pray lest you enter into temptation." This was an important warning.

Don't forget that just last week we saw Jesus tell his disciples that they would all be made to stumble because of him. That would happen that very night. That very night they would abandon him and deny him. All of this would happen when Jesus would be arrested and delivered over to the chief priests and scribes. The shepherd would be struck, and they, the sheep, would be scattered.

So Jesus had just warned them that this would happen. The disciples vehemently disagreed. They all vowed loyalty even to the death. And so then Jesus leaves with them and goes to the garden of Gethsemane. This was outside the city of Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives. Here Jesus leaves most of the disciples in a group with the order to stay put while he prays, and then he takes Peter, James, and John along with him to pray. He then leaves those three alone and prays by himself just a short distance away from him. But to Peter, James, and John, he tells them to stay here and watch. He tells them to watch and pray to keep from temptation. He tells them to be alert and on guard.

You would think that anytime Jesus asks you to watch and pray, you should perk up and do what he tells you. But *especially* in this context. Jesus just told them that they would fall away. They each vowed loyalty. Then Jesus says, we'll then, watch and pray that you don't fall into temptation. And what happens? They fall asleep.

And of course, it's interesting that Jesus picks Peter, James, and John to go with him. It's his inner circle of his inner circle. Who more fitting to go with Jesus in his hour of need, in this hour where he himself would face great temptation? Who more fitting than Peter, James, and John? Remember, Peter was the one who just a few verses back set himself apart from everyone. He said in verse 29, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not." He said he would even die with Jesus if necessary. James and John of course had said just as much. Back in chapter 10, they were the ones who boldly demanded from Jesus to be able to sit at Jesus' right and left hand when he came into his glory. At that time, Jesus responded by basically asked James and John if they were prepared to drink the cup that he would have to drink. Jesus was referring to the mission of suffering that was in store for him. Were James and John willing and able to suffer like Jesus was? They rather presumptuously said "Yes." They told Jesus back then in chapter 10 that they were ready to suffer for him. And so if any of the disciples should be willing to watch and pray on the eve of Jesus' arrest, you would think it would be Peter, James, and John. They had each clearly pledged to stand firm with Jesus, even if it meant suffering and death. But before they can even get that opportunity, Jesus gives them a much simpler task. They were to watch and pray.

But of course our passage doesn't just record for us that Peter, James, and John fell asleep on the watch. Mark draws us into the drama of Gethsemane. Here it is not just once that these three disciples falter on the watch. It's three times. The first time is in verse 34. Jesus had just told them how distraught he was, and so he asks them to stay here and watch. What happens? Just about an hour later Jesus comes back and finds them asleep - verse 37. I like how Jesus doesn't question them all about this. He directs his question to Peter. Simon Peter, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour! Peter who had just been so bold to vow allegiance and loyalty is now caught asleep on the job!

And so when Jesus catches them asleep after this first time, he then reiterates his command all the more clearly. Watch and pray so that you won't fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. That last line of course is very memorable. I've heard it quoted to me at a number of early morning prayer meetings, and occasionally after church if someone falls asleep. Surely this saying has that in mind - falling asleep. Because when Jesus leaves them a second time to go pray, that's what happens again. They fall asleep. And Mark tells us that their eyes were heavy. They were tired and just struggling to keep their eyes open. You know, when you are driving late at night, and you start to get tired, your eye lids might suddenly feel so heavy, that you just can't keep them open?

Of course, often we'll use this saying, "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak," as an excuse for why we fall asleep during prayer. But the reality is that this is not how Jesus' uses these words. He told the disciples these words not to give them an excuse. No, he gave them and us these words as a warning. Because of the weakness of our flesh, we need to *watch and pray!* These words by Jesus are a call to vigilance, in light of our weaknesses. Because of our weaknesses, it's all the more important that we watch and pray. The weakness of the flesh is only initially demonstrated by their sleep. The real weakness of their flesh would be demonstrated in just a short while. That would be when they would fall into the temptation that they had just previously disavowed. They would fall into the temptation of deserting Jesus in his hour of need. In just the next scene, the disciples would all forsake him and flee when he is arrested. That's the temptation that they needed to be watching and praying against, lest they succumb to the weakness of their own flesh.

And yet after the second time when Jesus comes back and finds them sleeping, they are left dumbfounded. They were left speechless. What could they tell their master after *twice* now falling asleep on the watch? How could they not be steadfast in prayer when he had specifically chosen them three to come along with him to pray. They had nothing they could say that could excuse their actions. Notice they don't say, "Sorry, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." They had no defense for their actions. But then, it happens a third time! All Jesus can do at that point is rebuke them and say, "It is enough." The hour of his arrest was upon them. The time of watching and praying was done. Now they would go and meet the betrayer.

And so three opportunities for these disciples to watch and pray. Three times they fell asleep. This of course anticipates Peter's three-fold denial that's going to happen before the night is over. And it anticipates how all the disciples would fall away. This shows how of little weight were their previous words where they had vowed loyalty to Jesus. If these three didn't keep their word to Jesus, none of them would.

And of course that is the case for us as well. We are not any different than these disciples. We can be so gung ho in lip service. We can be so enthusiastic and ready to serve. We can make all sorts of promises. But then before we even get

into serving we can fall short because we don't begin in prayer. We can say all the wonderful things we are going to do for Christ, but then don't even pray.

We need more than good intentions. And so may the disciples' failure to pray remind us that our actions should flow out of our prayer life. But the starting point is prayer. And so we need more than just a willing spirit. We need the Holy Spirit who wills for our sanctification. In prayer we ask for more of the Spirit and more of God's grace. We ask to be kept from temptation. We "watch" out for temptation as we pray. We pray that we can then serve God, uninhibited by sin.

But I believe there is more going on here in this passage than just a failure to pray by the disciples. Fundamentally this was their opportunity to really begin to share in the struggles and sufferings of Jesus. You see this passage is not just about the failure of the disciples. It's also about Jesus and what was about to happen to him. This is a rather profound event for Jesus. Jesus is well aware that he is about to be arrested and go to the cross. The hour was upon him. The cup of God's wrath was about to be poured out upon him. He would bear God's wrath toward sin on the cross.

This is what he came to do. This was his mission. And yet surely these last hours before the hour would be a final intense round of temptation for Jesus. This was the calm before the storm, but Jesus saw how great the storm was that was coming. Remember, though Jesus was fully God, he was also fully man. Scripture tells us that he was tempted in every way and yet was without sin. And now here before him was the greatest suffering one could imagine. Frankly, more than we can imagine. More than even just the physical aspect of the torture and the horrendous death on the cross. Jesus would bear the infinite wrath of God. How could he not be tempted to turn away at this pivotal moment?

You see we are drawn to see in this story an infinite contrast. The three disciples had opportunity to do what they had promised - to suffer with Christ. Here they had the opportunity to watch and pray, the very thing Jesus himself was doing. Jesus would watch and pray lest he succumbed to temptation. Of course the nature of Jesus' watching and praying would be of a far more intense scale than the disciples. They weren't being faced with suffering hell on the cross. They were being faced with sharing in Christ's sufferings, but no matter how much they shared in those sufferings, it would never be the same measure of those sufferings. Christ had come to suffer for us in such a way so that we'd never have to suffer in that way ourselves. And yet here in a lesser way the disciples could watch and pray along with Jesus who was watching and praying. They faltered in that smaller task. And yet, thankfully, Jesus did not falter in his mission.

Make no mistake at the seriousness of this situation. In verse 33 we see Jesus become troubled and deeply distressed. Troubled and distressed. The Messiah who is always so confident, is inwardly troubled and distressed. And then verse 34 says that he was exceedingly sorrowful. In case you forget, sorrow is an emotion of great sadness. Jesus was sad. It's hard for me to think of Jesus being sad, but that's what he was. He was so sad, it seemed to bring him to the point of death. By the way, may this remind us that emotions aren't bad in themselves. Emotions aren't necessarily sinful in themselves. Some emotions can be very, very strong. But it's what you do with them that determines if you are sinning or not. Psychologists talk about depression a lot. If your sorrow has you locked in inaction, is it a medical condition that needs treatment? Or is it really just a challenge to respond Biblically to the pressures of life?

Well how did Christ' respond to this swell of emotions? How did he respond to the temptation that was before him? Did he crawl into a hole and separate himself from

the rest of the world? Did he slump down in depression? Did he commit suicide? No. He prayed. He prayed alone, long and hard. Probably for three hours here straight.

If you look at what he prayed, you get a sense of the temptation that was before him. Verse 36. "Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but what you will." This was a serious temptation. Essentially Jesus' temptation is to find another way than the cross. Surely this is what Satan had already tempted him with. Back in chapter 8, Peter had rebuked Jesus for telling them that his mission was the way of the cross. Jesus responded by telling Peter, "Get behind me Satan!" Satan's temptation back then was to get Jesus to forsake the cross. Satan didn't want Jesus to complete his mission of the cross. Surely that temptation came back here again. If Satan could get Jesus to disregard the Father's will, then Jesus would have fallen in sin. Satan would have won.

Of course this was not the first time such a thing was tried. Back in the Garden of Eden there was a question of man's will versus God's will. God had told Adam and Eve that they could eat from all the trees except for one. But Satan challenged God's will. Satan tempted Adam and Eve to eat of that one forbidden tree. And so in the first garden, mankind said my will be done. Man disregarded God's will and chose his own will instead. Man listened to the temptation of Satan instead of the plan of God. And what happened? All mankind represented by Adam fell into sin. We all died spiritually.

But now in Mark there is another garden. And we have another representative of mankind. Paul would later refer to Jesus as the second Adam. Here in the Garden of Gethsemane we get a picture of why that is an appropriate title. Jesus Christ was put to the same question. He had the same temptation. Would it be his will or God's? Would Jesus succumb to the great temptation to turn away from the way of the cross? Would he allow Satan to twist and pervert his emotions to turn away in fear and sorrow? Would he fall prey to temptation to exalt his will above God's?

Well thankfully, Jesus did not fail or falter. He did not sin. He said, not what I will, but what you will. Surely if there was any other way for mankind to be saved, then God would have answered the prayer of his sinless, only-begotten, son. If there was any other way. But what Jesus did here is exactly what sinful man needed.

You see man had two needs. He needed a second Adam. And he needed his debt paid. He needed a second Adam. And he needed his debt paid. In terms of the debt - man had sinned and had earned damnation. For us that would mean suffering in hell for eternity. But Jesus, the God-man, would be able to pay for that by his death on the cross, where he suffered the hell punishment for us. The infinite God in the flesh is the only one able to bear such a punishment completely. Because Jesus bore the punishment, he satisfied the debt.

But we still needed a second Adam. You see, in the first garden we rejected righteousness. We had an opportunity to live righteously. To show ourselves as righteous. But we rebelled and showed ourselves as wicked instead. But if all Jesus did for us is earn our forgiveness, then all we really are is just put back on a clean slate. At that point we still would have to show ourselves as righteous, by our own works. But since Jesus is our second Adam, his righteousness is our righteousness. He not only didn't sin. But he obeyed perfectly. Even under temptation. Even under the greatest temptation. He watched and prayed and it resulted in perfect obedience.

And so we can either be identified with the first Adam or the second Adam. If we are identified with the first one, we are identified with an unrighteous rebel. From birth, we've all show how we identify with the first Adam. But Jesus offers us to be identified with him by faith. By faith we can be identified with the second Adam. The one who not only overcame the temptation at Gethsemane, but throughout his life. He had life-long perfect obedience. He experienced every sort of temptation, but didn't sin. That's the righteousness of the second Adam. And if we belong to that second Adam by faith, then it's our righteousness. It's how God sees us - as those covered not only in forgiveness by the blood of Jesus, but those covered in righteousness by the obedience of Jesus. Obedience like a robe that covers us.

If the disciples had to watch and pray, and found it difficult, how much more did Jesus need to watch and pray, and how much more serious was the temptation! Yet Jesus did not fail. But he watched and prayed and then went to the cross to save us. He saved us from all our sins, even of those of falling asleep when we should be watching and praying. He watched and prayed even when we do not, so that he could complete the mission given to him. And he did complete it, praise be to God!

Saints of God, the command that is clear in this passage is a call to watch and pray. It was the command that the disciples failed. It was the very thing Jesus obediently did. This word for "watch" is an important one in this passage. It appears three times: in verses 34, 37, and 38. The idea behind this word "watch" is a very specific one. The idea is to stay awake so you can be on guard, on the watch. It's like the night watchmen sort of watching. You stay awake in order to watch. It's vigilance. That's why the actions of the disciples falling asleep is the exact opposite of what Jesus commands here three times.

Well a night watchmen or a guard at the city gate of course was watching for a specific thing. They watch for approaching enemies and intruders. What were the disciples supposed to be watching for? What are we supposed to be watching for? Well Jesus told them. They were to watch that they didn't fall into temptation. It's a sort of *spiritual* vigilance that they were supposed to be doing. If we cross the street and are vigilant to make sure oncoming cars don't hit us, then we are on the watch for physical dangers. But if we are being *spiritually* vigilant, we'll recognize the sorts of temptations that Satan brings us. For the disciples, the most imminent threat for them was that they'd forsake Jesus. That they'd deny him when he is arrested and flee. What about you? What are the sorts of temptations that you have? What temptations do you struggle with? Quick, think in your mind, what are they?

If you don't know the answer very quickly, then maybe you need to be more vigilant. Maybe you need to be more watchful. You need to be on the watch for Satan's temptations. If you don't know what temptations commonly afflict you, then you probably haven't been vigilant enough spiritually. You probably haven't been watchful enough.

Of course, just being watchful is only half of the commandment here. Jesus says watch *and* pray. Being vigilant is not enough. Why? Because the solution for overcoming temptation is not in yourself. When you recognize struggles with sin, we need to bring them to God. We need to pray for his Spirit to work inside us. We need to pray for power to overcome the temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak, and so we need to pray for the Holy Spirit to be at work in our lives. Neither good intentions, or even watchfulness is enough on its own. We need to pray.

Of course one good way to pray is with the Lord's Prayer. You might have noticed there are some allusions to the Lord's Prayer here. The Lord's Prayer starts out, "Our Father." Jesus prays, "Abba." That actually means "My Father" in the Aramaic. The Lord's Prayer says, "Thy will be done," and Jesus says in verse 36, "not what I will but what you will." The Lord's Prayer says, "Lead us not into temptation," and in verse 38 Jesus tells the disciples to pray, lest they "enter into temptation." I don't think these combined allusions are accidental. Mark is reminding us to pray, and he calls to mind the Lord's Prayer. Lots of time people tell me they have trouble praying because they don't know what to pray or how to pray. Well, why not start with the Lord's Prayer?

So we are called to watch and pray that we won't fall into temptation. But I think this command for us takes on an even bigger perspective. You see I mentioned this word for "watch" appears three times in this passage. It actually only appears a total of three more times in the rest of Mark. And those three other occurrences are all in the same place. They are back in Mark 13. That's where Jesus warned us about the tribulation to come. He gave us the parable about a master going on a long journey, and when he did he put a servant in charge to watch at the door. The servant who was supposed to be awake, "watching," for his master's return. The servant didn't know when the master would return, so he had to always be vigilant. Jesus gave that parable to tell us to be spiritually vigilant, specifically, to be ever ready for the Lord's return. Well, with Jesus repeating this three-fold usage of the word "watch" here in our passage for today, it clearly reminds us of this parable back in Mark 13. It means that his command to watch and pray is not only to be watching out for temptation. It's also to be watching out for his return. We must watch and pray against temptation. And we must watch and pray for the Lord's return. That's a full picture of the sort of spiritual vigilance that Jesus wants us to have. He wants us to be on guard against attacks of the enemy, but he also wants us to fix our eyes on the hope of Christ's return. What a wonderful day that will be. And the glory of that day makes all the vigilance against temptation in this life worthwhile. Our watching and praying has an end game. We are watching and praying that we would remain steadfast followers of Christ all the way until the Day. Until the day of his return.

When the disciples fell asleep, Jesus asked them, "Could you not watch one hour." This was likely a literal hour. He had probably gone and prayed on his own for an hour, only to come back and find them asleep. Jesus makes it seem like such a small thing to pray for but an hour. How we pray so little. It's a stereotype, but one that is often true - many Korean churches excel in this, praying vast amounts. When I think about the faithfulness of such Korean churches to be praying, I confess that I often think of how Jesus said that it was not our many words that will make our prayers be heard. Surely that is true. But that can be an excuse for why we don't pray as much as we should. For surely Jesus thinks here that to pray for but an hour is just a small thing. Oh, how we pray so little. Ultimately the sort of prayer Jesus would have us to do is not something even confined to just an hour or even three. Jesus wants us to be engaged in a lifetime of watching and praying.

Jesus watched and prayed here, and overcame the greatest of temptations. It is his Spirit that lives inside us, the power to watch and overcome the enemy, to watch and wait in preparation for his return. So as we watch and pray may we not do so trusting in the weakness of our flesh. But may we watch and pray boldly, knowing it is the Spirit of Christ who lives inside us. The conquering, overcoming, Spirit of Christ. The one that truly knows how to watch and pray. May that Spirit watch and pray in us and through us, his humble temple. Amen.

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