



Questions from Jesus' Final Week

“Are You Asleep?”

Mark 14:32-42 | March 4, 2018

Introduction: Have you ever fallen asleep and missed something important? I remember back in college taking an 8:30 a.m. Old Testament Archeology class. I always sat in the second row, right in the middle, and the seat in front of me was generally unoccupied. One morning, I was especially tired and kept inadvertently nodding off. Not the way to impress a professor. What made it even worse was that my professor chose to teach the class sitting on the desk in front of me. Needless to say, it was a mortifying morning.

In our text, the disciples are sleeping through something important. Jesus has been anointed for burial, He has shared a final meal with his disciples, and now He leads them out of Jerusalem and through the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives and into a garden called Gethsemane. Knowing that the hour is at hand when He will be handed over to be crucified, Jesus invites His disciples to keep watch while He goes off a little ways to pray.

Gethsemane, in Hebrew, means Olive Press. It was (and still is today) an olive grove, but it was also the place where the olives were crushed and pressed to remove the oil for use. This process involved grinding the olives using a large, round stone after which the smashed olives were put into baskets and pressed three times, each with more weight than the time before. The first pressing produced the highest quality oil which was offered as a sacrifice or tithe to the temple and used for anointing. The second pressing produced oil that was used in baking, cosmetics, and medicine, and the final pressing gave the oil that was used in lamps.

Here, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus goes off by Himself three times and prays to the Father, pleading that the cup of God's judgment might be taken from Him. Three times He is pressed under the weight of the task that is before Him; taking the sin of the world and the judgment of God upon Himself in the form of death upon a Roman cross. Luke adds in 22:44 that He was in agony and that as He prayed, sweat and drops of blood gathered on His brow. These are anguished prayers. This is one of the rare moments in Scripture when we see Jesus distressed or troubled. Jesus truly suffers under the strain of obedience. St. Ambrose writes, “[H]e took upon him not the appearance, but the reality, of incarnation. It was therefore necessary that he should experience grief, that he might overcome sorrow, and not shut it out...” Yet Jesus ends each prayer with humble obedience: Not what I will, but what You will.

And the disciples sleep through the whole thing. They miss it. They fail in the task that Jesus has given them. They cannot keep watch for even an hour. Jesus comes back, and He warns them to watch and pray so that they do not fall into temptation, yet once again, they fall asleep.

Pray: Lord Jesus Christ, You suffered under the weight of sin for us and for our salvation. You drank the cup of God's judgment in my place. You were obedient to the Father even to the point of death though all authority in Heaven and on earth is Yours. Yet we have fallen asleep. Like the disciples, You call us to keep watch and to pray, but we grow weary. In Your mercy, forgive us. Because of Your grace, awaken our hearts and our minds to Your Word by the Power of the Spirit that we might not fall into temptation but live in obedience. Through Christ our Lord we pray, Amen.

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Read: Mark 14:32-42

Discussion:

1. Have you ever fallen asleep at an inopportune time? Share the story (what was the scenario, what were the consequences, etc.).
2. Why do you think Jesus took Peter, James, and John aside with him to pray? Who are people in your life who you can "take with you?"
3. Think about a time when you saw someone you trusted distressed or troubled – maybe a parent or grandparent or a mentor. How did this impact you? How do you think the disciples might have reacted to Jesus in the garden? How might you have reacted?
4. What do you think about the fact that Jesus "fell on the ground" to pray? What is going on for Jesus? Do you think that our physical posture is important when we pray? How might it impact our prayers?
5. What does Jesus pray for? (How do you think you might have prayed if you were in Jesus' place?) Why do you think Jesus prays three times?
6. What might Jesus' prayer teach us about our own prayers to God? What makes it difficult to truly pray, "not what I will, but what you will?" Do you think Jesus' prayer is prescriptive for how we ought to pray?
7. Each time Jesus comes back from praying, he finds Peter, James, and John asleep. Where might we find ourselves 'falling asleep?'
8. What sort of temptation do you think Jesus was talking about? How does the life of prayer guard against temptation in our lives? In what ways (that you don't mind sharing) might you experience a spirit that is willing but flesh that is weak? (Remember that we all have struggles! Part of the joy of the body of Christ is being able to share with one another and pray for one another!)
9. In what ways is God calling you to watch and pray with Him?

Application: Jesus finds Himself in the Garden, facing His death and struggling with what is to come. His prayer is not some farce or charade. It is real. It is the cry of ultimate suffering. Yet He submits himself to the will of the Father for our salvation. In reading this passage, remember that prayer was a consistent part of Jesus' life. Throughout His ministry we see Jesus going off alone to pray, and when the ultimate test comes, He once again gets on His knees in prayer. What role does prayer have in our lives? This week, as you seek to be watchful, challenge yourself to a habit of daily prayer. And if you are feeling bold, you might even try getting on your knees!

Pray: Most merciful Father, we are Yours. You have made us for Yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You. By Your Spirit's power, enable us to stay alert, to keep watch, and to pray. Teach us to abide in You and to do Your will, through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.