

Six Signs of Sleepiness

The Cross (Part 2)

Mark 14:1-9 (Mt.26:6-13, Jn.12:1-8) 2/12/2021

Summary: You know you're drifting off to sleep spiritually when you care more about what people think than what God thinks, you have a weakening vigilance against sin, a critical attitude about other's worship (especially when they love Jesus more than you do), when people matter to you more than God, when you prioritize earthly things above eternal things, and when God's Words don't seem true. The spiritual adrenaline that will wake you back up is living by faith rather than feelings.

Hook: Why do so many people crash their cars because they fell asleep at the wheel? It's because sleep comes upon you so gradually that you don't realize when you're crossing the threshold from being awake to being asleep. It's the same spiritually. This message reveals six warning signs that you're starting to drift off into spiritual sleep.

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Mark 14:1 Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. 2 "But not during the Feast," they said, "or the people may riot."

3 While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

4 Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? 5 It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly.

6 "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. 8 She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. 9 I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

Introduction: The Stakes

Every year, about 100,000 people in the United States crash their cars because they fell asleep at the wheel. They started out awake but sleep overtook them without them realizing it. There was never time when they realized, “Oh, in 10 seconds, I’ll be asleep. That’s just enough time to pull over.” It doesn’t work that way. Sleep sneaks up on you. The transition is so gradual that at the moment you cross that line into sleep, you’re not aware that you’re crossing it.

Spiritual sleep is the same way, which is why Jesus repeated his warning about staying awake so many times at the close of the Olivet Discourse. Stay awake, keep your head in the game, don’t lose conscious awareness of the spiritual realm. If you’re not constantly on you guard, sleep will overtake you without your realizing it. So before moving on in Mark 14 I thought it would be good to do another message just on this one question : What does this passage teach us about how we can know if we’ve been drifting off? I showed you last time how Mark structures this in such a way as to show that he means us to read chapter 14 in terms of observing the sleepiness and wakefulness of the various people. So that’s what we’re going to do. And if you’re not sure it’s worth spending another whole session on this, just look at verse 21. This is what can happen if you fall asleep.

Mark 14:21 ... woe to that man ... It would be better for him if he had not been born.

Is that a terrifying statement or what? Judas goes from being one of the 12 Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ to having the Lord say it would be better for him if he had not been born—all because he didn’t stay awake.

So what are the signs? How can you tell if it’s happening? When you’re driving you can tell it’s starting to happen when you keep finding yourself half way on the shoulder or in another lane. What are the indicators that it’s happening spiritually?

Signs That You Are Dozing Off

Sign #1 Diminished Fear of God

The first one we’ll learn from the chief priests. These guys are spiritually comatose. **Mark 14:1 ... the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. 2 "But not during the Feast," they said, "or the people may riot."** What does that tell us about them? They’re afraid of the people, but not God. They’re scared to death of what the people might do if they arrest their favorite celebrity , but they aren’t one bit afraid of what God might do if they murder his Son. Fear of the people keeps them from doing what they really want to do. Fear of God has no impact on their behavior. God’s displeasure isn’t a factor.

So one clear sign that sleep is overtaking you is when you’re more afraid of displeasing people than you are of displeasing God. More of your actions are calculated to please or impress certain people than to please God. When people are happy with you or people are angry with you, that affects your emotions more than if God is happy or unhappy with you. Fear of man is a sign of sleepiness. It’s a sign that your vision of the spiritual world is fading, and all you can see is the physical world, which is the definition of spiritual sleepiness.

A Weakening Vigilance against Sin

And just like falling asleep at the wheel, it’s so gradual that it can happen without you realizing it. I think it’s safe to assume these chief priests didn’t start out as murderers. Probably not too many years before this they would have been horrified at the thought. They thought the same thing we all think—“I’m not even capable of committing that sin. I would never, ever do that.” And yet now here they are, no compunction, no embarrassment—the openly talk about it with other religious leaders. Somehow, over time, they fell asleep.

So look back a few years. That’s how you can tell if you’ve had gradual, unnoticeable decline. Compared to the way things used to be, do you see a decreased vigilance against sin in your life? When

fear of God fades, your alarm over sin in your life fades. You used to fight like crazy against sin; now you've relaxed. It used to be a war—you hated the sin in your life, you felt sharp stings of conscience when you stumbled. Now, dealing with it is kind of on the back burner. You'll get around to it, but right now you're busy with other concerns. Maybe you've struggled with a sin so long, you've kind of made peace with it now. You used to like strong, convicting sermons; now you'd rather everything just be positive and encouraging. You rarely find yourself confessing a specific sin to God or to other people. Those are signs you're spiritual consciousness is fading. That's what we learn from the comatose chief priests, now let's look at the groggy disciples.

Sign #2 A Critical Attitude about how Others Worship

They're not as out of it as the chief priests, but they aren't exactly alert either. A woman comes and worships Jesus and honors his death in a beautiful way and their response is "Why this waste of perfume?" and they rebuked her harshly (v.4). They're in the greatest moment of human history and they're absolutely oblivious to it.

Irritated rather than Inspired

This is another sign that your spiritual eyelids are getting heavy—when you find yourself being critical of the way other people worship Jesus—especially when your criticism is that their worship is over the top. You know you're falling asleep spiritually when you're irritated rather than inspired by those who are more effusive in their worship than you are. They rebuked her because they thought they were superior to her in wisdom. But it turned out, she was superior to them in worship and that irritated them.

Calling someone an extremist is the natural response of the flesh whenever you see someone who, frankly, loves Jesus more than you do. When you see love like this—love that moves the person to give up that which is precious to them—it's really uncomfortable because it leaves you only two options. One option is to acknowledge it as good. That's a problem because it implies I should be like that. It implies I need to make a change because the way I am now isn't good enough. If what she did was good, that means I should do it too, but I don't want to do things like that. I can't afford it.

So all that leaves me is option #2—find fault with the person. If I can discredit the person, then I'm off the hook. I don't have to feel bad about my level of worship if I can establish that that person is a kook. I don't have to do what kooks do, right?

This is how the flesh responds. I listen to a David Platt sermon, and he's talking about giving up your house and doing all these radical things for Christ, and I think, "I don't know if I like his speaking mannerisms—he's kind of melodramatic. I don't think I like him—too weird." He's weird—okay, good, now I can write him off. I don't have to sit here and listen to a wierdo. But if I were honest with myself, I'd have to admit that if he were saying things I wanted to hear, I'd probably love his mannerisms. Criticizing the way others worship Jesus is very often a sign of spiritual sleepiness.

Freedom in Expressing Love

How *should* you respond when you see people who love Jesus more than you? Do I need to do everything people like David Platt and Francis Chan are doing? Should all the faithful followers of Jesus have poured super-expensive perfume on Jesus' body to prepare for his burial? A hundred people lined up at the door with flasks of perfume? No. Jesus never commanded that anyone do this, and no one had to do it, including this woman.

Remember what Peter said to Ananias after he lied about his gift? Everyone was selling their land and giving the money to the church. That's wonderful. It was good. But just because it was good didn't mean Ananias had to do it.

Acts 5:4 Didn't [your land] belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal?"

He didn't have to sell the land and he didn't have to give the money. He would have had to find *some* way to express his love for God—that *is* commanded. But it didn't have to be the same thing everyone else was doing. God gives us wide open freedom in how we express our love.

The perfume—that was Mary's thing. Peter didn't have to do that. He could love Jesus in his way. Jesus doesn't say she did *the* beautiful thing; he says she did *a* beautiful thing.¹ You're perfectly free to do some other beautiful thing if you want. You can do anything as long as it's beautiful by Jesus' standards.

This same principle goes for finding God's will. Sometimes when people pray for guidance they ask God to show them his will, as if God only willed one thing. God wills lots of things and you're free to do any of them. When you face a hard decision, you don't have to figure out which option is the only one that is God's will. Thousands of things are God's will and you're free to pick any one of them. Just do something beautiful in his sight and you're good.

So when you see someone pouring out effusive love for Jesus, don't be threatened by the idea that if you endorse it as good then you have to do it too. Instead of being threatened, be *inspired*. Don't get defensive, don't become critical. Let Mary do her beautiful thing, let David Platt do his thing, rejoice in that, and let it inspire you to do your own beautiful thing.

She Did What She Could

8 She did what she could.

Literally, "That which she had, she did." Different people have different resources, different abilities, different opportunities. Mary had perfume and access to Jesus right before his death. What do you have? Use that to honor Christ your way.

What a comfort this is that Jesus praises her for doing what she could. How many times have you thought, "Man, I wish I could ..." I wish I could help that person. I wish I could be there for her. I wish I knew what to say. I wish I could make him feel better. I wish I had the money to help him. So many things we would do if we could. But God isn't concerned with what we can't do. We say, "I wish I could do X, but the best I can do is Y." So we just do that and Jesus smiles and says, "Well done. You did what you could." Use what you have—the personality type you have, the knowledge you have, the desires you have, your gifts, your way of doing things—use that to do a beautiful thing.

But don't ever use what you don't have as an excuse to do nothing. "I wish I could preach like Billy Graham, but I can't." "If only I had the money of Bill Gates, I would do this and this and this ..." And you get so caught up in what you wish you could do that you never get around to doing what you actually can do. The disciples didn't have to pour perfume on Jesus, but they should have done *something*.

One dangerous sign of spiritual sleepiness is when you criticize other people who are using what they have to do what they can instead of letting them inspire you to use what you have to do what you can. That's #2. The first sign of sleepiness—diminishing fear of God. Another sign—a critical attitude toward the way other people honor Christ. The next one is in v.5.

Sign #3 When People Matter more than God

4 ... "Why this waste of perfume? 5 It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor.

Why are you wasting money on the Lord when it could be given to people? A 3rd sign that you're falling asleep spiritually is when the needs of people seem more important than the glory of God. They're okay with this woman giving a huge, extravagant gift as long as it's for people; just don't waste

¹ That phrase "beautiful thing" (literally, "beautiful work") is a technical term for charity (Daube, "Anointing at Bethany" cited in WBC). When they used that catch phrase, "beautiful work," everyone knew, "Oh, they're talking about giving to the poor." Jesus says, "Helping the needy isn't the only work that's beautiful. This woman didn't do that beautiful work, but she did another beautiful work—an act of exquisite beauty.

it on the glory of God. That's how you feel when you're asleep. Falling asleep means you've lost conscious awareness of the spiritual world. When that happens, you still want to help the poor because you can see with your physical eyes how that does some good. But the glory of God feels like a fairy tale.

And it affects the way you look at sin. Sins that hurt people seem really evil to you, but sins that don't hurt human beings—all they do is assault the authority of God—those seem like victimless crimes. Assaulting someone or stealing from someone—that seems really evil and really does a number on your conscience. But lukewarm, halfhearted, passionless worship doesn't feel all that evil. Coveting, that doesn't seem all that bad—it doesn't hurt anybody.

And it's the same on the positive side. Someone who helps the poor is a hero. Someone who does something to honor God but it doesn't help any people, she's just a weirdo.

In verse 6, Jesus answers their question with a question of his own. They ask, "Why this waste?" and Jesus responds with: "**Why are you bothering her?**" The word means to trouble or harass. "Why are you hassling her?" They ask Mary why she's misusing money and Jesus asks them why they're mistreating Mary. And what's the answer? Why *were* they mistreating Mary? Because her worship was too much.

People who see only the physical world will never get upset at you for having too much education or too much wealth or power or fitness or fame. But they're really on their guard against too much religion. The worst name you can be called these days is religious extremist.

And actions that honor God but that don't seem to benefit humanity seem like a waste to them because they're asleep in the spiritual world. If they woke up, they would realize that nothing benefits humanity more than God being glorified. Nothing helps poor people more, nothing benefits the sick more, nothing is more profitable to the down and out more than an action that shows the glory and worthiness of God more clearly. That's the best thing you can ever do for any individual or mankind as a whole. But you can't see that when you're asleep because when you're asleep, you judge reality mainly by what you see in the physical world rather than by what the Bible says about the spiritual realm. So when you see people honoring God, it seems like a waste.

And so we need events like this recorded in Scripture to wake us up and show us that God's glory matters more than human comfort. Worship is more important than philanthropy. Jesus is more important than all other human beings put together. If it's a choice between honoring God and helping a poor person, honoring God is the far better choice.²

Being awake means being able to see that God's glory matters more than human comfort and that worship matters more than servanthood. We tend to think of humble servanthood as the pinnacle of good deeds. Servanthood is important for sure, but did you know that when Mary did this, Martha was also present? She was there too, and guess what Martha was doing? No surprise.

John 12:2 Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. 3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus.

Martha was serving, but who did Jesus honor? Mary. Jesus made Mary famous for this incident, and most people don't even know Martha was even there. This was the second time Mary choose the better thing than her sister and got scolded for it by people, but she was honored for it by Christ. Glorifying Jesus is more important than helping people. When that doesn't seem true, you know you're drifting off to sleep.

² Thankfully, we rarely if ever have to make that choice, because Jesus made a way for us to accomplish both in the same action when he said, "Whatever you've done to the least of these brothers of mine you have done to me." If we help the poor *for the purpose of honoring Christ*, we accomplish both what Mary did and what the disciples wanted to do. We can honor Christ *and* help the poor. But if we just help the poor without regard for the Lord, we accomplish nothing.

Sign #4 Theoretical Love

And that's not to say caring for the poor is unimportant. It's vitally important. When Jesus says, "**The poor you will always have with you**" in v.7, he's not saying, "There will always be poor people, so don't worry about them. Nothing can be done about that." Just the opposite. He's making a reference to Deuteronomy 15:11 which says, "**There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.**" There will always be poor people therefore always be helping them.³ Helping the poor should be part of your regular routine. Not just when you see a guy ringing a bell at a Wal Mart. It should be a line item in your regular family budget.

Generous with Other People's Money

So why were the disciples suddenly worried about the poor right at this moment? **7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want.** If you're really concerned about the poor, nothing was stopping you from helping them yesterday or the day before that. You want this woman's money to go to the poor—what about your own money? Beware of people who are generous with other people's money. The disciples were the original social justice warriors—they want to redistribute Mary's wealth to the poor. Generosity with other people's money is not generosity.⁴

Theoretical Category vs Actual People

So this is the fourth sign that you've got a little bit of drool coming out of the side of your mouth and you're nodding off. It's when you're concerned about the distant, theoretical poor as a category—you're all about philanthropy and helping mankind, but you're not very kind to actual human beings that are right in front of you. Jesus asks, "Why are you attacking this woman?" He doesn't wait for an answer, but what if he did? What would they say? "Why are we attacking her? Because we care about the poor. We just want more kindness in the world. We love humanity—that's why we called her a stupid, wasteful idiot, because we're so committed to being nice." I don't think that answer would work. When you're "love" for people in general makes you unloving toward the people right in front of you, and you have a lot of theoretical love but not much practical love, you know you're falling asleep.

So that's #4 in our list—theoretical love instead of real love. Number 5 comes in verse 7. Let's call this one distorted priorities.

³ In fact, the same chapter that says there will always be poor people also says that shouldn't be the case. There shouldn't have been poor people in Israel.

Deuteronomy 15:4 However, there should be no poor among you, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, 5 if only you fully obey the LORD your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today.

If Israel obeyed God, they wouldn't have had a poverty problem.

⁴ The Democrat party is known for its emphasis on social programs and government spending for the poor.

Percentage who give more than \$1000/yr to charity:

* 4 of Democrats

* 12% of Republicans

Percentage who give less than \$100/yr to charities:

* 35% of Democrats

* 19% of Republicans

This isn't to endorse the Republican party. I have plenty of complaints about both parties. The point here is only to show that the more generous people are with other people's money, the less generous they tend to be with their own.

Sign #5 Distorted Priorities

7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me.⁵

You can help the poor anytime, but they want to do it right here—right at the very moment when something a million times more important is happening. Honoring Jesus right before his death—that was a once-in-a-lifetime, once in world history opportunity. And they missed it. The greatest, most important sequence of events in the history of the world was just about to begin, and they were distracted with something that was a daily, routine issue. Their sleepiness distorted their priorities.

How do you know you're falling asleep? When there is diminishing fear of God When you have a critical attitude of the way others worship—especially when their love for Jesus outshines yours When people start to matter more to you than God When your love becomes theoretical and somehow skips over the people right in front of you And now #5—when the routine priorities of life feel more important than the death of Jesus. We do a hundred routine things every day that are very good and very important—going to work, homemaking, caring for your family—all that kind of stuff. Those things are important, but when you get spiritually drowsy, we feel the importance of those things, but we lose the sense of importance for the things that don't have any immediate, practical, visible effect. Feeding your family—that's obviously important. Atheists can see that as important. Worship doesn't have that same feel. If I can't make my mortgage payment, that feels like a disaster. But if my voice is missing from the praises being offered at church on Sunday morning, I can't see, with my physical eyes how that really hurts anything and so it doesn't feel as important as my house payment. That's a sign I'm falling asleep and it will result in missed opportunities to accomplish great things in the spiritual realm.

Sign #6 When Scripture Doesn't Seem True

And that brings us to one last sign of sleepiness. This one we'll learn from what Jesus said about Mary. What was it that made Mary's action so beautiful in Jesus' eyes? How does he describe what she did? **8 ... She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.** Jesus told everyone he would be killed as a criminal, but Mary was the only one who took his words seriously. All the shock and horror the disciples felt when they saw Jesus up on that cross and the spear being rammed through him and he took his last breath—all those feelings, Mary is feeling that already, here at this dinner. The next day the disciples would all be trying to process the loss of Jesus. Mary is already processing it. Jesus' words were just as real to her as seeing it happen because she was awake.

Not the First Time

One of the best ways to find out if you're awake or asleep is by how you respond when the Bible says things that don't seem true. Do you believe whatever the Bible says, or do you go with your gut when the Bible says things that don't compute? Any time the words of Scripture start sounding to you like myths, you find yourself questioning them more and more—that's a sign you're falling asleep. When the promises of Scripture don't calm your fears anymore. The incentives in Scripture don't motivate you. The affirmations of Scripture don't give you joy. The warnings don't scare you. You start to become cynical about the things of God. Even when he fulfills his promises right in front of your eyes, you come up with naturalistic explanations. Whenever you hear another Christian share a story of great things God did for them, you're skeptical. "They're probably exaggerating. That stuff never happens to me." And that affects your prayer life. You find yourself praying less and less because you don't really believe God does much of anything. That's a sign you're going under—you're spiritual consciousness is slipping away.

⁵ We don't currently "have" Jesus in the way they did. There is a tendency by some to interpret all the passages about Jesus' reign as being fulfilled now in the Church age. But there is a real sense in which Jesus is no here and will return in the future (See Mark 13:34-35).

Spiritual Adrenaline

So those are six signs to watch out for—and if you find all that discouraging, and you’re thinking, “Wow, I’m barely conscious spiritually, how am I going to wake up?” this passage has great news for you. Whether it was just one in the list or all six, there’s one solution for all forms of spiritual sleepiness. I was going to call it spiritual caffeine, but I thought better of it because caffeine doesn’t work all that well for me. I’ll tell you what does make me alert and wide awake no matter how tired I am—adrenaline. If I almost run off the road and just barely miss a crash, my heart is pumping, my eyes are wide, and my senses are as alert as they can be. That’s the farthest from sleep I ever am.

If you want to be wide awake spiritually, what is the adrenaline that will keep you alert? One word: faith. All you have to do is the same thing Mary did: listen to Jesus and believe what he says.

Faith will show you the wreckage of Judas’ sleepiness and scare you to death. Faith will show you where Mary ended up and make you long to hear similar “well done” words from Jesus.

If you’re nodding off in some areas, resolve to stop living by feelings. Living by feelings is when you let your feelings determine what is real. I have a good feeling about this, so it must be true. That doesn’t feel right, therefore it’s not right. That’s living by feelings and it’s the most powerful spiritual sedative in the world. It will put you right to sleep.⁶

Maybe this is why Scripture uses little children as a model for faith. It’s easy for kids to believe something other than what their eyes tell them because their eyes are so often wrong. They’re used to it. “Daddy, will you give me a boost so I can touch the moon?” He lifts them up and what looked doable turns out not to be. And they just shrug it off. That sort of thing happens to 2-year-olds on a daily basis. Something looks one way, and then turns out not to be what they thought. But when we get older, we get over-confident in the ability of our eyes and ears to discern what is true. We forget just how many true things require faith rather than sight to know them—even in the physical world. The earth is round even though it looks flat—we believe that by faith despite what our eyes tell us. The sun doesn’t move around the earth, your body is over 99% empty space, germs can kill you even though they’re invisible—we believe that by faith despite what we see and feel. We generally don’t have a problem living by faith in what scientists tell us, but when God tells us something that doesn’t match what we see and feel, we struggle to believe.

I think this is the #1 way Satan gets Christians to stop going to church. They have a bad experience, they are disappointed by the things they see with their eyes, and they begin to think that’s what the church is instead of believing what the Bible says about the church. They’re living by feelings instead of faith.

Faith Comes through Hearing

So the adrenaline that will wake you up from sleepiness is faith. And how do you increase your faith? Faith comes by what? Hearing (Romans 10:17). How did Mary end up with such strong faith? The other time we see her, what is she doing? Sitting at Jesus’ feet, listening to him. If you want to have stronger faith, spend more time listening to the Lord’s words. Read the Bible, listen to sermons, read things that help you understand Scripture, when you have some free moments, meditate on the things you’ve read or heard. Make sure messages from God are in your mind more than messages from this world. And listen with a heart that is eager to believe.

I hope all this talk about staying awake doesn’t come across as burdensome to you. When Jesus tells us to stay awake, it’s not a restriction of freedom; it’s a call to live in the real world. It’s an invitation to open your eyes and come out of darkness out into broad daylight so you can interact with the world as it

⁶ That’s not to say feelings are unimportant. They’re the goal of the Christian life—greater and greater delight in God. That’s our highest goal. They’re the goal, not the foundation. If we start to use feelings as the foundation—our basis for discerning what’s true and what’s real, we *will* be deceived. God’s Word must be our basis for everything we believe, even when it says something different from what you feel.

really is. Then you can say with the psalmist, “You have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of life” (Psalm 56:13).