

## Mark 14:32-50

### Sleeping in the Shadow of the Cross

*And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping – v. 37*

With exceeding sorrow pressing Him to the point of death, our Savior reveals His true humanity in the garden of Gethsemane. Nowhere else in the gospels do we find the desire on His part to be held up by the 3 disciples that had been closest to Him. And nowhere else do we find, therefore, the failure of those disciples so magnified. Aaron and Hur could stand beside Moses and hold up his hands while Moses interceded – but at such a time when Christ needed the same type thing we read instead that Christ came and found them sleeping. And then He left again and returned again and discovered that even after His admonition to watch and pray they were still asleep – *for their eyes were heavy* v. 40 tells us *neither wist they what to answer him*.

It makes for an interesting study in the Bible to note the occasions when various people slept while other stayed awake:

- I'm reminded of Jonah who could sleep in the bottom of the ship amidst a raging storm while all the pagans on board the ship were wide awake calling on their various gods. It makes for interesting meditation to contemplate how one running away from God could nevertheless sleep in that storm.
- I'm reminded of the disciples crossing the stormy sea of Galilee while Christ slept in the hinder part of the ship. On that occasion sleep was the last thing on the minds of the disciples. They were panic stricken and thought they were going to perish and in contrast to their panic Christ could take His rest in peace.
- Even in the mount of transfiguration we're told in Luke's account of that event that *Peter, and they that were with him, were heavy with sleep; and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him* (Lk. 9:32). Their experience certainly illustrates for us that we need to be spiritually awakened to behold the Lord's glory.

How often do we find the opportunity to behold the glory of Christ in the written word but such is the sleepy stupor of our hearts that we miss the glory of Christ as we sleepily drag our eyes over the words of Scripture and then flatter ourselves that we've done our devotions.

Most dreadful of all, however, is the sleep that we discover on the part of the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane. I suppose there's a sense in which we can't blame them. They didn't really understand Christ when He explained to them that He would be apprehended and put to death. Little did they know or appreciate the agony that was now pressing down upon their Master.

I believe you'll see before we're through with this study – that our own sleep in the shadow of Calvary's cross is more inexcusable than theirs. They didn't know at the time

the real meaning of Christ's death. It was yet to be explained to them how Christ must suffer before He entered into glory. But you and I do know. We know the meaning of the cross. We have the benefit of the entire New Testament teaching us the meaning of the cross. We have the benefit of thousands of years of church history to aid us in our understanding. How is it, then, that with all we know we can still emulate the disciples in their sleep?

This is a dreadful thing – for the followers of Christ today to sleep in the shadow of the cross of Christ. This sleep should be dreaded and feared and avoided at all costs. If this sleep cannot be overcome then it matters little what else we do. Our families will fall prey to the sleep of death.

And so I want to focus on this theme this morning – the theme of sleeping under the shadow of the cross.

## We Must Dread Sleeping in the Shadow of the Cross

The Lord's table, I hope this morning, will serve to keep us from sleeping under the shadow of the cross. Would you consider with me, then, first of all that we must dread sleeping in the shadow of the cross:

### I. Because of What This Sleep Means

To the disciples this sleep meant that the flesh had stronger pull than the spirit. *The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak* Christ says in Matthew's gospel. Even though the disciples knew from Christ that His burden was heavy and his need was great they were unable to watch and pray with Christ because the flesh placed heavier demands on them. The flesh cried for sleep. It's quite possible that the devil had his part in adding to the weight of their sleepiness. I believe the devil possesses such a weapon in his arsenal.

John Bunyan certainly recognized the danger of carnal sleep. In *Pilgrim's Progress* he writes of Christian and Hopeful – *And I saw then in my dream that, as they were passing through a certain vale, a gradual weariness assailed their limbs. The air was heavy, as before a storm; and they grew very drowsy. I can hardly keep my eyes open, said Hopeful to his fellow. Let's stop, and take a nap. For sleep is sweet to the labouring man, and we may wake refreshed. Equally, said Christian, we may never wake again. For this, methinks, is the Enchanted Ground, of which the Shepherds warned us. Poor Hopeful looked aghast at being so unwise. Had I been here alone, he said, I must have met my death!*

I'm sure that you can relate to such battles with the flesh. How is it that when we set ourselves to praying all of a sudden we grow sleepy or we become hungry or we suddenly remember some insignificant thing that now becomes very important to tend to? For if you don't tend to it now, then you're bound to forget it later and as a result it's prayer that becomes forgotten instead.

If only we could learn the lesson from our text that when you feel like praying least that's when you need to pray most. *Watch ye and pray* our Savior says in v. 38 *lest ye enter into temptation*. When sleepiness gets the best of us over our spiritual endeavors we become all the more vulnerable to sin.

But if this kind of sleepiness is bad, in and of itself, how much worse is that sleepiness that takes place in the shadow of Christ's cross? I said a moment ago that this is far worse for us today than it was for the disciples then. At that moment in time they still didn't understand or appreciate the meaning of the cross. You and I can't make that excuse. And so the sleepiness described in our text takes on the meaning to you and me that we've become desensitized to the sufferings of Christ.

We can read the accounts of His sufferings in the gospels and not be effected by it. We can sit under the preaching of the cross and yawn our way through such sermons even while we hear of the lashing of His back and the nailing of His hands and feet and the piercing of His side.

I wonder this morning how often it could be said of you what the words of our text say – *And he cometh, and findeth you sleeping*? We know that there's a sense in which Christ has come here this morning. We have His promise that He's here among us when 2 or 3 are gathered in His name. Does He come only to discover that you're desensitized to what He's borne for you? You're asleep, as it were, to the greatness of His agony and pain and the love that moved Him to endure such pain for you.

Such a condition ought to be dreaded for this is the very essence of hardness of heart. And if we fall prey to this kind of hardness – this kind of lack of spiritual sensitivity to the things of God and to the sufferings of Christ in particular – what remedy can we possibly prescribe for such a dreadful condition?

It seems that in our day and age there can be found this widespread sense of need. All across America today it seems that spiritual remedies are being sought because there is the knowledge that something's wrong in our churches. And in the quest for remedies we see a number of pendulums swinging from one extreme to another. The need is for higher standards – some churches say – and in order to attain those higher standards they impose as many regulations upon their constituents as the Pharisees imposed on the Jews in the days of Christ. And then the pendulum swings the other way and the mindset prevails that says the problem with the church is that it has too many unwarranted rules and has become too legalistic which in turn leads to discarding nearly all standards and giving themselves over completely to the world under the guise of Christian liberty.

Or you may find the mindset that says the church needs to provide more activities. We need programs for teenagers and programs for senior citizens and programs for single moms and activities for the kids. And then the pendulum swings back the other way and the mindset comes to the fore which says the church is weighing us down with all these programs. They're infringing on our families and demanding too much from us. It's the church's fault that there's so much stress and strain within our homes. And it's become

increasingly common in our day for church to be avoided altogether or for church to be held at home within the family.

And as these pendulums swing back and forth another mindset can be found which says we need to find the right balance. We have to avoid going to any extreme on any of these matters and we must find the right point between the extremes.

The problem is that none of these pendulum swings work at any point in the pendulum's path and especially does none of this work in those situations where Christians have gone to sleep and are unaffected by the sufferings of Christ. This is a dreadful condition, then – this sleepiness in the shadow of the cross. We should dread the effects of such sleep on ourselves and on our families. We should dread the effect of such sleep upon our children – for if they grow up in a home that is sleeping under the shadow of the cross it won't matter what you endeavor to protect them from they'll fall prey to the flesh and the world eventually.

Is there a solution to this sleep? I believe there is and that it's found in the very words of Christ – *This do in remembrance of me*. It is here, around this table, as we remember the broken body and shed blood of Christ that we should find the power to overcome this dreadful sleep or spiritual insensitivity. This leads to my next point – not only should we dread sleeping in the shadow of the cross because of what that sleep means for the state of our souls but we should also dread it:

## II. Because of What Christ Endured

All the while His disciples were sleeping, Christ Himself would not and could not sleep. This is what I find interesting about this passage of Scripture in contrast to the stormy sea setting in Mark 4. In the midst of a raging sea it was Christ that could sleep but His disciples could not. I think the contrast between the setting of the stormy sea with this setting of being in the shadow of the cross indicates to us plainly that a stormy sea which could cause the disciples to panic was nothing to Christ especially in comparison with the storm that was before Him in our text.

The trial before Him was of such import that it pressed Him sorely. *He began to be sorrowful and very heavy* – (Mt. 26:37). He was in *an agony* (Lk. 22:44). He was *sore amazed and very heavy* (Mk. 14:33). His own testimony to His disciples was that He was *exceeding sorrowful even unto death* (Mt. 26:38). The phrase *very heavy* which occurs in Matthew's gospel and Mark's gospel is a term according to one Greek lexicon which is the strongest of 3 terms used to denote *depression*. Here, then, is strong depression on the part of Christ. To those that fight with depression – behold the depression of Christ. He can relate to depression too.

Some theologians and commentators suggest that the thing that made this trial so oppressive to Christ was the reality of our sins being laid upon Him. And don't we know that sin is depressing. When we read of sin in the news and we sigh as we see sin becoming more and more acceptable – that becomes depressing. I read a statistic recently

about how acceptable pornography has become to college students both men and women – that’s depressing. I read also of a Christian wedding photographer and her husband who were hauled before some government board to be investigated for discrimination. It seems that they refused to take pictures of a sodomite commitment ceremony – that’s depressing.

So in our text we find Christ, now, having to bear the weight of sin being imputed to Him. It’s no wonder He was sorrowful and very heavy and in an agony that pressed Him to the point of death. He was about to pay for the sins of the world. He would soon be forsaken by His Father. He would soon bear His Father’s wrath. We thought on that subject the last time we met around the Lord’s table and it occurred to me in the course of our current study that we learn more from the garden of Gethsemane about the dread of the cross than we learn from the actual event. For when the actual event took place the time came when a veil of darkness shielded Christ’s sufferings from view. They were beyond expression. They could not be recorded – even in inspired literature. We must gauge the weight of Christ’s sufferings by the agony we behold in Him in the garden of Gethsemane.

One preacher of old made the observation that for Christ not to feel the awful dread of what lay before Him would have made Him less than human. It’s only the careless sinner that can view the wrath of God with indifference. When the time comes for that wrath to be revealed against the world, we see in the book of Revelation that the world’s indifference will be replaced by a desire for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them and cover them – such will be the dread of God’s wrath at that time.

But now we see Christ in our text facing that wrath – feeling the weight of that wrath – being sore amazed that it would have to come to this. This is not, after all, how God created man. It was man that sinned but now Christ would pay rather than let man pay for his own sin. So Christ endures a tremendous struggle – tremendous enough to lead Him to say *if it be possible let this cup pass from me* – or – *let this hour pass from me* as we read in Mark’s gospel.

I believe Christ’s request for that cup to pass exists more for our sakes than for His. There was no weakening in His resolve to see the matter through. He had said earlier in John’s gospel *Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour* (Jn. 12:27). He would, however, have us know the dread of that hour and so He prays but also submits to the hour by saying *O my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt*.

And in the mean time His disciples slept – having no idea of real extent of Christ’s agony and the spiritual warfare that was at that moment being waged by Christ – it is in the setting of that intense warfare and deep agony that we read the words of our text *and He cometh and findeth them sleeping*.

The very ones that He looked to for support in His agony now only add to the weight of His agony. How tempting it would have been, I suppose, for Christ to come upon His sleepy disciples and simply say – *let’s just forget it. There isn’t enough interest here to*

*prompt me to see the matter through. Should I bleed and suffer and die while my followers give in to sleep and remain oblivious to what's at stake?* There was certainly nothing in the disciples from which our Savior could draw encouragement.

But still He continued by leaving them and pressing the matter in prayer again. And He returns and finds them in the same state of sleepiness again *for their eyes were heavy* (Mk. 14:40) *neither wist they what to answer him*. But still our Savior will not give up. He returns a third time and prays the same words with the same fervency and then returns and finds them sleeping still but then makes the announcement that it was now time to rise because His betrayer was at hand and soon after He further announces to His enemies that this was their hour and the power of darkness and then we read that *they took him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house* (Lk. 22:54). And in all that follows we see the fulfillment of what John records for us in Jn. 13:1 *having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end*.

I'm glad today that just as Christ pressed the issue of salvation with His intercession in the shadow of the cross before Him that He continues to make intercession today with the cross being behind Him. *Who is he that condemmeth?* – Paul asks in Rom. 8:34 *It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us*. And the author of Hebrews adds that *He ever liveth to make intercession for us* – He intercedes for us in order that salvation may applied to us *to the uttermost* (Heb. 7:25).

This means that in the midst of our sleepiness or our lack of sensitivity to Christ's sufferings, He, nevertheless, continues to make intercession for us. He continues to plead with His Father, based on His atoning blood that the benefits of redemption that were purchased by His blood will be applied even to His sleepy disciples of our generation.

Does His love, then, not compel you to dread all the more your own sleepiness toward His affection for you? Should it not be our heartfelt cry that the Lord would so shed abroad His love in our hearts that we will not become desensitized to it but that it will be, rather, the ruling force of our lives? The elements of this table issue the call to us to wake up. It is Christians that are addressed by Paul when he exhorts them to *Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light*. (Eph. 5:14).

Let us rise, then, to the remembrance of His love. Let us plead with Him that He'll deliver us from the sleepiness of spiritual insensitivity so that His love will be real to our lives. Our own well being and the well being of our children depends on the love of Christ becoming reality to their and our hearts rather than being some dogma that we give a yawning assent to.

May Christ Himself see fit to quicken us according to His lovingkindness as we remember His broken body and shed blood this day.