



“Watch...”

Matthew 26:36-46
by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Matthew 26:36-46 *Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." 37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. 38 Then He said to*

them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." 39 He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." 40 Then He came to the disciples and found them asleep, and said to Peter, "What? Could you not watch with Me one hour? 41 "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." 42 Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." 43 And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. 44 So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. 45 Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 "Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."

None of us, as we read this passage, can possibly know what was happening in the heart and mind of the *man* Jesus Christ. For even though there was indeed deity in that garden that night, that which fell to His knees and literally sweat blood, was also *all man*. We see the manifest of His deity...the Spirit-filled God in flesh shining forth that night as He prayed. But we also see a man functioning at the height of extreme pressure. He knew what was coming. He knew what his next few hours would hold. Thus we see a picture that presents Christ as sorrowful and deeply distressed. He asked His friends to stay and keep Him company during this difficult trial. There is even an appeal to the Father that He might be spared the dreadful things ahead. In light of such a stark and personal expose, why then would the Holy Spirit make sure that this story was forever recorded in both scripture as well as the enduring pages of history if not for our benefit?

Christ, even while bearing great anguish and pain, did not run, He did not lose himself under a cloud of emotional angst and panic. He did not melt under a wave of fear. In all of this, Jesus expressed on the occasion of this historic evening, that which is to be the tone and manner of our approach to God, *even while under the most intense moments of our lives*. Despite great distress, Jesus still remained composed in the midst of His distress. He still manifested great reverence in the midst of great pressure. His dialogue with God did not degrade in the midst of this profound situation. The prayer He offers was so grand as to have been listened to by the greatest scholar, yet it was so simple that anyone is able to both receive it and pray it also. Every sentence, every word, every syllable, was suitable to the majesty of heaven yet Jesus never forgets, for one moment, that He is in an intimate conversation with His Father, the Creator and Owner of everything. How could He have kept His composure? How did He make it through?

Jesus was herein preparing Himself for what was coming, while the apostles apparently believed themselves to be standing on firm spiritual ground. Jesus got ready for battle, while the apostles got ready for bed. Jesus prayed, the apostles slept. I wonder about us: *are we getting ready for what's coming? Are we watching?*

Who was on stage that evening? Peter and the Sons of Thunder. We know that these guys were “go-get-’em” kind of fellas. However, as often is the case, what was their strength would ultimately be their downfall. Believing themselves to be strong, they all now would fall. And sadly they would fail in such a public, and frankly *humiliating* way. Once again, their dirty laundry would be recorded here in the bestselling book in history for all to see!

There is no doubt that Jesus anguished over what was coming. Yet such was ultimately not due to the certain coming pain and death that was His greatest concern, but rather the separation from the Father that would occur upon the cross. A time wherein God the Father would “turn away” from sin as it sat upon the Son that hung upon the cross. An act which would precipitate those immortal words which rang out from the cross, “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*”

Jesus seemed to understand the danger that these men faced. Temptation, as always, was out there waiting. Not just temptation’s classic presentations: the “*sins of the flesh...the lust of the eyes... and the pride of life.*” But rather the benign and subtle creep of human passivity and our tendency to laziness and the flesh. The slow and steady gravity slide away from self-discipline, forward growth, and the lifestyle of a spiritual soldier. Billy Graham warns in his book “Nearing Home” of the danger of our “middle years.” At first we as new born believers are passionate and zealous and live in a perpetual spiritual “sprint.” Then at the end of our lives we tend to be attentive to what’s ahead, for we know that our “exit ramp” is imminent and we don’t want to miss it. Ahh, but in the “middle years,” things are far more mediocre. We tend toward the passive and procrastination. We lean toward comforts and temporary material pursuits.

Sadly, this issue has never been more critical than at this point in history. For never before has there been so many distractions, so much adversity to the faith, so much false teaching of the “easy Jesus” and the “easy faith” where we just sprinkle a little Christianity on our existing lives to “increase the flavor.” We live in an age where the attacks and persecution of Christians is un-paralleled, at least measuring the past few centuries. Not only is there no sign of relenting, there is every reason to believe that such will only increase. Anti-scriptural “science” positions are being presented as overt “facts” when such is simply not true. Theirs is based upon a belief with presuppositions and theory, and anyone who tells you otherwise is simply lying. There is a lot of lying going on these days. And the simple freedom to live your life as you choose is quite honestly in great danger. This is all a fulfillment of last day’s prophecy, a future that is fraught with Christian persecution, especially for the scriptural version of Christianity. Unless we are watching and prepared, like the apostles before us we will be caught sleeping when the enemy advances.

A recent review of John MacArthurs new book “Hard to Believe” says this: *"It's Christianity for consumers: Christianity Lite, the redirection, watering down, and misinterpretation of the biblical gospel in an attempt to make it more palatable and popular. It tastes great going down and settles light. It seems to salve your feelings and scratch your itch; its custom tailored to your preferences. But that lightness will never fill you up with the true, saving gospel of Jesus Christ, because it is designed by man and not God, and it is hollow and worthless. In fact, it's worse than worthless, because people who hear the message of Christianity Lite think they're hearing the gospel-think they're being rescued from eternal judgment-when, in fact, they're being tragically misled."*

Today there are a lot of people living such a watered-down version of Christianity. So many people who are running around and saying they are Christians but do not have lifestyles that back it up. So many of those who grace the pews of America are essentially asleep in the garden. Christ is indeed present, but they are unaware of his grieving spirit or what is in reality happening around them because they are spiritually asleep. They are caught up in the same traps that the world struggles with, pursuing the same goals and material gain that the world is pursuing. So how are we different? How are we “separate” as He calls us to be?

Christ says in Revelation concerning these folks: *“I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!”* (Revelation 3:15–16 NLT) A more literal translation of the word “spit” would be vomit.

It’s not like we haven’t been warned! Scripture is replete with council and directives as to our living on this matter. But somewhere along the way we have lost the concept of a **biblical** approach toward faithful living. One which calls for those antiquated ideals such as priority, commitment, holiness, first fruits, and the discipline of discipleship. Yet even for apostles the danger was real! Jesus warns, *watch and pray* - or you will fall!

For Jesus, His prayer was a reflection of His heart and passion, but ultimately the bottom line was still, *“Father...I want your will to be done.”* What’s **your** bottom line?

For the boys that were present that evening, it was an embarrassing event. Down through history these guys are now on public record for “sleeping on the job.” I guess such comes as the price of public ministry where everyone gets to see not just your shining moments and stellar examples, but your failures and shortcomings also. Everyone does stupid stuff sometimes, only when you are a leader it’s out there for everyone to see!

Jesus understood a very crucial truth, and He attempted to use this “teaching moment” to express it’s importance: *out there, just around the corner the enemy awaits. We can’t stop him from coming, but we can be ready when he gets here. Watchfulness sees and praying prepares. Today, the reality of the enemy is real, but so are the weapons of our faith. Watch and pray, watch and pray.*

Jesus stated in Matthew 24, that last days will be like the days when Noah built the ark and the world was destroyed by the flood. **Genesis 6:5-13** speaks of those days, a time when the world was filled with wickedness and violence. Like now, mankind lived for evil and gave no thought to God or His will.

The word “*imagination*” we find in Genesis 6:5, means “*to fashion as a potter.*” It means that men had fashioned every form of evil and gave themselves over to every sin and desire of the flesh. They were so wicked and so given over to the pursuing of the evils of sin that God set about destroying mankind from the face of the earth. In verse 6 of that Genesis account we find that God was “grieved.” God wanted a relationship with man, but man had no desire for God.

It is easy to see that we are living in days like those in which Noah lived. Truly, *“the wickedness of man is great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually.”*

Recently, a lot of people around the world have suffered incredibly due to natural disasters. Hurricanes have destroyed homes, businesses and taken lives. Fires took lives of people who refused to heed warnings. Earthquakes have rendered buildings to piles of rubble. Often the warnings beforehand were there. It was not “if” it was only “when.” I am reminded of the photos I have seen of coastal neighborhoods virtually erased from the face of the earth, except for that one house that remained. One house standing starkly against the backdrop of carnage. How did that house make it? It was ready for the storm, that’s how. The occupants built the house to withstand what was coming. They were not “asleep.”

Jesus says that this was how it was in Noah’s day. Certainly the people were warned by Noah. For 120 years, as he built the ark, he was preaching about what was coming, (**2 Pet. 2:5**), but the people just ignored his warnings. They did the things they always did. They ate, they drank, they married and lived as they always had. They ignored all the warning signs and they paid an eternal price for doing so! Verse 39 of Matthew 24 says that they “*knew not*” until it was too late. We too are living in a day of spiritual complacency and moral apathy. As we watch the end approaching, we are also living in the midst of a complacent people. People have great spiritual needs, but they cannot see them and they do not care! For most, life is about fun, entertainment and the quest for things. God is still warning people to flee the wrath to come, but people are refusing to heed the warnings. Preachers are still preaching, but people are not listening.

How are we any different than those men that night in the garden? How many of us are carrying on day after day...going to church, wearing our Christian t-shirts and donning our fish stickers on our cars. But are we truly ready? Because there is a storm coming that is un-paralleled in human history. We cannot be satisfied with our current foundation because we have so far remained standing today in our present spiritual “weather.” We must dig deep and hunker down for the coming storms or we will ultimately perish in the final act of our lives.

Jesus is still asking the same of us as He did that night in the garden. Watch and pray. Watch and pray. We must grow stronger and get ready for what is coming. We must never stop growing, getting stronger, learning and equipping. Henry Ford said that “anyone who stops learning is old, whether at 20 or 80.”

(Psa 55:22 NKJV) *Cast your burden on the LORD, And He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.* How are we “sustained” when we’re under a heavy burden? By prayer. By casting our burden on the Lord.

(Jer 33:3 NKJV) *'Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.'* How does God show us great and mighty things? Through prayer.

(James 1:5 NKJV) *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.* How do we gain wisdom in our trials? Through prayer.

(Phil 4:6-7 NKJV) *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.* How do we gain the peace that passes understanding in a difficult time? Through prayer.

(Mat 21:21-22 NKJV) *So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. {22} "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."* How do we gain the peace that passes understanding in a difficult time? Through prayer.

We too are called to both *watch* and *pray*. Because the flood is coming. We can ill afford to be sleeping today.

Jesus Himself was facing His greatest temptation that night– the temptation to run. Jesus knew He was going to be betrayed, arrested, beaten, and crucified in the next couple of hours. They had already left the city and there was no good reason to stick around other than the fact that Jesus knows this was the reason He came – to die.

Jesus tells His disciples to watch. 1 Pet 5:8 NKJV says “*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*” We need to stay alert because we have an enemy that is looking to cause us harm.

Our urge is almost compulsive: move, do, work, worry, struggle. Staying awake and praying is not what our flesh wants to do. Jesus watched and prayed, and He didn’t fall into temptation. The disciples DIDN’T watch and pray and they blew it.

Joe Lewis was at one time the heavyweight boxing champion of the world. He fought 69 times professionally, winning 66 and loosing 3. He tallied 52 knockouts and held the championship from 1937 to 1949, the longest span of any heavyweight titleholder. He defended his title 25 times. Bill Stern, the voice of American sports on the radio at that time, decided toward the end of the Brown Bomber’s career that he would interview him and find out the secret that Lewis used and how he could win over people who were at times much larger than he. His answer was very simple “I study my opponent, I plan my fight very carefully. The results are always the same. I’m never surprised and I stay on the offensive”.

That sounds like how we ought to handle our enemy, Satan. Stay alert Christian. **There is a storm coming...**