

Sleep On Now

3 Word Sermon

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Bible Text: Matthew 26:45
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To our midweek prayer meeting this evening. I invite you to turn in the word of God to Matthew 26, Matthew's gospel, chapter 26. As you're turning there, just to bring before you a couple of announcements, those that need our prayers. There are a number I will make mention of some names later on but just to give you an update in relation to D. R., an email just came in literally minutes before the prayer meeting began so if you had the opportunity to read the email that was sent out earlier today, there was the sad news of the tumor being inoperable and a biopsy being too risky. Well, in follow-up to that, Hannah says that her dad is being discharged from the hospital and, Lord willing, will be heading home either tomorrow or Friday depending on whether his neuro-oncologist wants to see him one more time before we leave. As of now, there is no biopsy planned and request for prayer so that was the update of this evening, so we want to be praying very much for the Ellison's and the Lord's grace to them and the Lord to give them help at this time.

Matthew 26 is where we are tonight, beloved, as we come to pray. There are many matters to pray for, many people who need our prayers, and the Lord's work that needs to be upheld in general. Matthew 26 and we're going to read from verse 36, the record given of our Lord entering to Gethsemane and the details as we have them here in Matthew's gospel. Matthew 26, let's read from verse 36.

36 Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. 37 And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. 38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. 39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. 40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? 41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. 42 He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. 43 And he came and found them

asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. 44 And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. 45 Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Amen. We'll end the reading at verse 45. Let us fill our hearts in prayer and seek the Lord, beloved, as we come to his word and need strength even as we come to pray that the word would be a help to us tonight.

Lord, we gather again this Wednesday evening. We give thanks unto thee for the opportunity that is afforded to us to be here. We are thankful, Lord, for thy mercies that we enjoy daily and we think of the tremendous needs that surround us in this day in which we live, some of them are needs that are beyond our locality, they are in other parts of the world, that some needs are pressing right at home but, Lord, I pray whatever the needs are and wherever our burdens may be this night, that we would have grace to seek thy face aright. There are pressing needs in this portion that we have read together, needs, Lord, that seem to be lost on the disciples and they did not grasp at the circumstances, they didn't take hold of the exhortation that the Lord Jesus gave to them, that we so often find ourselves like them, but we come to the house of prayer and, Lord, we ask that thou would look up us in mercy. We don't come to this place like a people who are here to impress thee, it's not like we have lived today in such a fashion that God is impressed with our behavior and our spirituality, but we do come with intent and we come with a desire that collectively we may bring the burdens of the work of God and the people of God and the lost that are dying and perishing all around us. So help us in this task, we pray. Give strength, give the Holy Spirit, and may thy word come with relevance to the hour in which we find ourselves. We ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen.

We were mentioning on the morning of the Lord's Day about the different gardens that we find in Scripture and I made mention of just a couple and the significance, of course, of the garden of Eden and then the garden that was located right by where our Lord Jesus was crucified, but we come again this evening to the scene taking place in a garden, another momentous occasion and one that we should not easily forget. There's lots of mystery around the details of Gethsemane and much has been said and many sermons may be preached. There are some series, there are some messages, occasions that are forever etched in your mind and I will never forget being a Christian for about two years or so and my aunt handing to me a handful, I think about seven or eight cassette tapes, yes, cassette tapes. That's how old I was. It was 2004 and the car I drove still played, in fact, it was Melanie's car, still played cassette tapes so I took these cassette tapes from her. I had never heard of the preacher. I didn't know who he was but on her recommendation I stuck in one, you know, the first cassette and then began to listen. It was a series preached by a Baptist minister now retired, still alive, Albert Martin, on Gethsemane, and I will never ever forget listening to Al Martin preach on Gethsemane. It was one of those, you just, you can't forget it. You can't forget listening to him depict the scene, the suffering, the agony, and the various application that he drew from that.

Well, I'm not here tonight to go in depth like Al Martin did on that occasion but I want to draw your attention again to three words that we find in verse 45 when our Lord Jesus says, after having these three occasions of him separating himself from the disciples, he, of course, has taken Peter and James and John a little farther than the others and he himself goes on and he is given a charge to Peter and James and John particularly, it seems, for them to watch. So you see that in verse 38, "Tarry ye here and watch with me." So there was nothing assumed. It was an instruction, it was a command given to them to watch with him, and so three times he goes and he comes back and in verse 45 we read, "Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." The words "sleep on now, sleep on now," there's a sense in which this doesn't make any sense. The whole event, the scene that is before us he has been encouraging them to watch and they have failed to watch. They have not prayed. They have not taken heed of what the Lord had instructed them to do, and so we would understand if they had been diligent to do what the Lord had asked them to do, that he would then say, "Sleep on now, you know, now is the time for rest, go ahead." But they had failed. They had failed to watch, they had failed to pray, they had already given themselves to sleep so why, then, would the Lord say sleep on now? And again there are different ideas but by and large most reliable commentators take the idea that this is a rebuke. There is a sense of irony in the words, even maybe sarcasm, though not all take it that far. John Gill, the Baptist commentator says, "The sense cannot be that they had watched sufficiently and now might sleep and take their rest, for they had not watched at all but rather that he had now no need of them or their watching with him." You can sleep on now. Carry on. And really the sense, then, is that they had missed the opportunity. They had missed the opportunity to watch. They had missed the opportunity to pray. It was gone and that time could not be reclaimed. And this has such challenge to us because far too often we are just like the disciples.

So I want to think about this, sleep on now, think of this exhortation in terms of the challenge that it brings not being that the Lord's commanding us to sleep on but that we take the charge that comes, that undergirds it, that we don't want to be found missing the opportunities and being told that to sleep on, you've wasted, you've wasted the opportunity, you might as well sleep on.

So as we consider this tonight, I want us to see, first of all, we often sleep at times of responsibility. We often sleep at times of responsibility. The Lord had called them, as we noted already in verse 38, to watch with him, "Watch with me." Now let's ask the question: was there or would there have been benefit for the disciples to watch, or was this something that had no inherent benefit at all? Would there be a benefit? The scene before us is unique in human history. Peter and James and John particularly are being drawn in to see something that no one had ever seen and no one would ever see again, but they didn't see that. I don't think they understood that and this is a warning to us. Sometimes we fail to see the benefit in commands that God gives to us. We don't understand what the benefit may be or why we should do X, Y or Z, but just because you do not understand the benefit does not mean there is not a benefit.

It's very common today, that's not new today, it's as ancient as the church is, but it's very common even today to still see the critics of Old Testament Scriptures and particularly certain aspects of case law in the Old Testament, and you have people that read it and they say, "This doesn't seem like a very good thing," so they see, you know, parents bringing their son to be stoned and they think, "Oh, I'm glad we don't live then." They don't understand and really what they're saying is, "We are wiser than God. We understand things better than they did then." And I'm not getting into that now but it's just one example, certain case laws that people read and they think it doesn't seem to make sense to them, but just because you don't understand does not mean to say that God has made a mistake or that there is no benefit in what God is commanding you to do. You must embrace with all of your heart each command that the Spirit of God reveals to you through the word. Each thing that either is explicitly revealed are those things by good and necessary consequence you come to realize this is what God would have me to do. This is for our benefit. This is for our good.

Now our temptation, then, as we are sometimes called to do things, is to walk away from that and miss the opportunity, miss the seasons of responsibility that God lays upon us, and this is not good. The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:8, "every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour." So you wonder then what would the reward be for Peter and James and John for falling asleep when they were told to watch and pray? What's the reward? That's in the Lord's hands, of course, but certainly if every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor, then they missed out, didn't they? They missed out on an opportunity to labor and receive a reward based on that labor. They didn't do it. Jesus invited them to do it, Jesus instructed them to do it and they failed to embrace the responsibility and we must not do that.

In Romans 12:4 and following, "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office." We're not the same. "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us," so on and so forth that starts to give the various aspects in which we may serve examples of aspects of service to the Lord. But regardless, we have gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us. You have gifts. You do. And of course, you will exempt yourself from applying yourself to those gifts if you think that all gifts must look a certain way, so you look at individuals who maybe are involved in the Lord's service in some fashion, pastors, ministers, teachers, so on, and you think, "Well, I don't have that, therefore I don't have gift." Wrong. Not true. We have gifts. They differ and the question is have I embraced the responsibility that comes with the gifts I have? Have I? Is the Lord asking me in a certain sense to watch with him, to give myself to something with the Lord, stand with the Lord, serve with the Lord, embrace this responsibility for the Lord or am I neglecting? Because if you're neglecting, then you're gonna miss the opportunity.

The Lord gauges the responsibility we embrace. That seems to be clear from Luke 16:10, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much." There's an analysis, the Lord can see the man who can't take or refuses to embrace the responsibility for little, though he has perhaps big ideas

about what he would do if he was gifted in other ways to take on more responsibility, well, if I was gifted in these ways, then I would do it. The Lord says, no, that's not how it works. It is the one who sees that the littleness of his gift, the littleness of his ability, and embraces that, takes ahold, "It's not very much, Lord, I know it but I'm taking ahold of it and I'm not gonna miss the opportunities that may arise for me to do what I can with this for you as those opportunities arise."

The disciples slept when the Lord gave them a responsibility and we are to learn from this error. We do not want the Lord to have to say to us, "Sleep on now. Sleep on now. You might as well go to sleep. I had something you could have done, had it there but you prioritized something else and the opportunity is gone. Go to sleep." It's tragic, isn't it? Secondly, we often sleep at times of opportunity not only responsibility but times of opportunity and two ways we may think of this. Tonight, first opportunity is to learn. This was an opportunity to learn, an opportunity that would forever be etched into their minds, an opportunity unlike any other given to anyone else. Peter and James and John were brought in to see the Son of God agonize, wrestle in prayer, in a fashion that is almost so sacred it's difficult really to, you're almost afraid to over-analyze this scene for fear of making error of judgment in what's going on. But they were brought in, they were brought in to watch. When the Lord shut himself off from the world, enclosed in the darkness of the hour and with all the trees around and separated from where anyone would have heard him, he gathers his disciples with him and brings Peter and James and John particularly and says, "Look, you watch with me." And what lessons they could have learned. They failed to see that the Lord was so close to his death. They failed to grasp how little the opportunities were that were still going to be afforded to them to be in the presence of their Master.

So they slept. Slept. This was an opportunity to learn. We must be those who embrace our opportunities to learn. Talking about it with the children again yesterday, just trying to emphasize again aspects of the book of Proverbs and going through that book with them and trying to help them to see that this, that all the Canon of Scripture is important but you need to get Proverbs early. You need to get it early. As I have said before, it is given so that we don't make the mistakes that people think we have to make in order to grow and to learn. No, you don't have to do that. You can learn from the book of Proverbs and then not make those mistakes. We must learn and we must learn at every opportunity that God gives.

Now we are in an age where people don't read very much, not as much as they used to, at least in the church I think I can say that. We are not the readers that we once were and that is having an impact I think perhaps far greater than we realize. The shallowness of the understanding of the Christian faith in the church is what's making her easy to just brush aside and ignore, so that even when God gives two certain people who are believers and do love his name, when they get positions of responsibility, they don't know what to do with it. They don't have the grounding, the power of mind, the persuasion, the arguments, the sense of grasping with what the will of God truly is so they cannot bear, and as you well know in this land, those that profess the name of the Lord, they're almost the same as those that don't. People of a certain political stripe, some are Christians, some

are not, some profess at least to be Christian, but you wouldn't know the difference hardly, not in the way they view the world, not in the way they consider how to conduct their political life, how to vote and so on. There are nuances of the will of God they just don't see at all. They don't see it because they don't know the Lord's word. And we're the same. We are an ignorant era.

It's very easy, I remember, you know, so learn from me, learn from my mistake. When I moved to Canada, I thought it was kind of part of a bigger picture, we stripped, we got rid of everything. I mean, we moved our entire family in about 26 or 27 medium size boxes, boxes about the width of that lectern there and about the same height, 27 boxes for our entire family. That was it. All the large furniture were left. Everything left, and part of our stripping down of everything was I looked at my library and thought, "I can have digital forms of this. Or I don't need this anymore." And I got rid of it all. When I got to Canada I thought, "What have I done? What have I done?" Then you start trying to rebuild again and so on and so forth. It's just so silly. It's so silly. Even with digital access to things, it's all tied to a license. Those books aren't missionaries. We have a physical hard copy of a book as a missionary, it's so that when I die it will go somewhere else and bring his message to someone, but when I die and stuff's just on my computer, someone might use it for a while and then toss it out and it's gone. It doesn't have legs, longevity. It won't go anywhere. It won't do anything. And even in terms of the influence it can have just sitting on the shelf.

Winston Churchill said, "If you cannot read all your books, at any rate handle, or as it were, fondle them. Peer into them. Let them fall open where they will. Read from the first sentence that arrests the eye. Set them back on the shelves with your own hands. Arrange them on your own plans so that if you do not know what is in them, you at least know where they are. Let them be your friends. Let them at any rate be your acquaintances. If they cannot enter the circle of your life, do not deny them at least a nod of recognition." I remember reading that a good time ago, a good while ago, and thinking there's a lot of truth to that. There are many times that you just, you pick a book up and you kind of just glean from it and that's obviously not the best way but it's better than nothing. It's better than nothing. But how many young people now are building a library? Reading books? How many of an older generation are still building a library? Thinking about the impact those books might have on lives after they're gone?

Our opportunities for learning are brief, they're momentary, and we are far too often found wasting away our time not learning, and essentially, then, we are like the disciples who and the Lord should say to us essentially now, "Just sleep on. You're not interested." You call yourself a Protestant and all this Protestant literature, you never so much as peer into any of it. You're not really interested in it. You can wear the badge but you have nothing of the depth, you have nothing of the character, you have nothing of the sense of the truth and wrestling with the doctrines and arguing it through in your mind and so on.

Oh beloved, opportunities to learn, they're scarce. We must take advantage of them. This is why even in the education of our children we must do it with diligence and see it as vital, absolutely vital. I do think that this, I mentioned this another context but I'm

inclined to think that even looking at it historically and some historians could maybe know better than me in this, but Europe was largely barbaric until Christianity came in and put an emphasis on education and started building schools or places of learning. And you look at the West and, you know, it's a mess now but you look at what happened in this meteoric rise to leadership in the world when other parts of the world were far more advanced prior to Europe, but they were taken over. Why? Why? Because Christians were enlightened and they understood the relevance of absolute truth and that there is one God and he has made all things and therefore everything has its order, nothing's by chance.

So the things we study are absolutely can be understood and if I realize that this is true, it's gonna be true on the other side of the world. It won't change. So whether that's $1 + 1 = 2$ or what the elements are of a certain compound or whatever, it stays the same. So the study of the science is a matter, when you get grounded in an understanding of who God is, it changes everything but we are not, we are losing. We are losing. The church is losing. Our children are losing out by not being well-grounded. Education is not salvation but I'll tell you something, we are to love the Lord our God with all our minds and we sleep instead.

Opportunities to learn. Opportunities to help. This is the practical outworking of our faith as well. We must be taking the opportunities to help. The Lord had invited them to help, hadn't he? I think there's a sense in which that's true, "Tarry ye here and watch with me. Could you not watch with me one hour?" Was it not an invitation that there was a measure of their prayers and their watching being a support to him? His humanity being borne by their presence, by their prayerful support? Coming back to see how they're getting on and finding them sleeping was a discouragement and he's bearing it all himself.

So we are told by the apostle in Galatians 6, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault," ignore him and let him figure it out for himself. That's not it. "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Restoring people, standing with people, it's all there.

Later on in the same chapter, verse 7 and following, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." Oh, oh, is that not applicable? The flesh is weak. You have given way to the flesh. You have allowed the flesh that is unable to stand, it's dominating and it hasn't the strength to do what is right. So they had sown to their flesh really here, hadn't they? "He that soweth to his flesh," love the flesh, "reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

So we have opportunities to help and if we're sleeping, if we neglect those opportunities, the Lord might as well come to you and say, "Sleep on now." That's what he would have said if you can take the scene of the Good Samaritan. The priest comes by, walks on. "Sleep on now. Sleep on now." Same with the Levite, comes, "Sleep on now. You missed the opportunity." It's gone. You'll not get it back.

Then we often sleep at times of spiritual intimacy. This was prayer the Lord was calling them to, wasn't it? To pray. Watching with him was that they should pray. The desire was that they should pray and they wouldn't pray. This is the pinnacle of our fellowship with God, prayer, and when we miss our appointments for prayer, then the Lord comes and says, "Sleep on now. You missed it. You can't get it back." Every Wednesday night that passes that we're not there, we miss it, don't we? Can't get it back. Sleep on now.

This entire scene before us, as we close, was one of opportunity and the Lord had graciously and very tenderly said to them, "Look, here's what I want you to do. This is what I want you to do." And they failed to do it. The vast majority of our lives the Lord is very gentle in how he instructs and teaches and orders and invites us to participate in things. He's not hammering us. He's not coming down heavily upon us. He has his commands and we know them and we are to follow them and obey them and do what he has called us to do, and he doesn't come with a heavy hand, but right at the point when the Lord says, "Sleep on now. You missed the opportunity. You might as well sleep." The enemy, the enemy then dictates that that was not going to be the case. He was not gonna let them sleep and the Lord in his providence using the events of the betrayal of Judas and those that were with him and all that would fall out from that, using all of that actually got the disciples up to face a challenge that they were not ready to face. The enemy didn't step back, the enemy comes in, the enemy comes in and presses and the Lord in his providence permits times of persecution or affliction that make it impossible for us to sleep any longer, and while it's a good thing for us, it's not pleasant. No one wants to be where the disciples where there's an army of men standing and you're trembling wondering what's going to happen, and then they follow exactly what the Lord prophesied, they all forsook him and fled. When they take hold of the Lord and they go, they all run. They run.

So the Lord in his providence, if we will not heed the commands or the invitations and the opportunities to grow, to learn, to work, to labor, to do whatever he calls us to do, if we do not learn to do that, there will be occasions of persecution or affliction where we can no longer miss the opportunities to learn. Certainly we will look back on them and say, "It was good for me that I have been afflicted." But it's not enjoyable at the time and it's sad that the only way we learn at times is through the afflictions and through the hardships. There are these little spaces of time where almost like time stands still where we are brought in, we shut out the world, and Jesus brings us in to pray, to learn, to learn something we could never have learned anywhere else, to watch with him, to pray with him, to grow, and we neglect that. And then the hardships come and there's no sleeping then.

So it's a warning to us. It's a warning to us we don't want to be missing. The easier times the Lord gives to us, wasting them through frivolity and nonsense, I don't know where this applies to where you are tonight, I don't know how it particularly applies to you, but I'm sure it has application either in your employment, or in your spiritual life, or in your family worship, or in your relationships and there are a host of different areas it could be applied. Seize the opportunities. Do what's before you now. Stop going to sleep and allowing the opportunities to pass where the Lord comes with an ironical statement and has to say to you, "Sleep on." Lord help us and have mercy upon us.