

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 14:32-42

Topic

In Gethsemane, Jesus addresses Peter as 'Simon'
and calls him out for falling asleep

Title

"Simon Says 'Sleep' "

Introduction

One morning, 85-year-old Winnie Withers of Indiana got up to pour herself coffee and found to her surprise that she had an 8-foot-wide hole in her kitchen wall.

Somehow she had slept through a vehicle smashing through her house and then fleeing the scene.

Her bed, by the way, was only about 20 feet away from the crash.

Sadly, the pie she had set on the windowsill to cool was never recovered.

Do you think you could have slept through the sinking of the Titanic? Six-year-old Robert Douglas Spedden did. His story was immortalized in 1994 in a book titled, *Polar the Titanic Bear*.

Written by his mother soon after they survived, then discovered and published by a relative decades later, it is the account of that night as seen through the eyes of sleeping-Robert's stuffed bear.

What about you? Is there something you once slept through, much to your own surprise or dismay?

At this point in my life, I think I could sleep through just about anything.

One of the worst, if not THE worst, sleep-throughs of all time has to be the account of Peter, James, and John nodding off while Jesus was praying in Gethsemane. Not once, but three times. It prompted Jesus to ask, "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour?" (v37).

The other eight disciples didn't fare much better. We're not told that they slept, but it's clear from the various accounts that they were completely passive in the situation. They might as well have been sleeping.

We're going to look first at the eight, and then at the three. I'll organize my thoughts around two questions: #1 Are You Passive In Obeying Jesus?, and #2 Are You Powerless To Obey Jesus?

#1 Are You Passive In Obeying Jesus?

(v32)

We tend to concentrate on Peter, James, and John, overlooking the other eight disciples. *Not so fast!* They were there, too, and we can glean a few things from them.

Mar 14:32 Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here while I pray."

Jesus had shared one final Passover meal with His disciples. It was also, for all practical purposes, the last Passover, because the Lord was about to be sacrificed on the Cross as the final (Passover) "Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world."

By the way, there will be a Passover celebration in the future, during the Kingdom of God on earth, after Jesus' Second Coming. It is discussed in Ezekiel 45:21-25. The Passover held at that time in the Millennial Kingdom is not a memorial to the Exodus; it is a memorial to the Cross, and to the true Lamb. Jesus will officiate at that celebration as He did with His disciples and it will look at His death as the final, perfect Passover Lamb.

The group, minus Judas the traitor, was on its way to spend the night outdoors, on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. Specifically, they were going to Gethsemane, a favorite and well-known spot for Jesus to repose.

After being quite stealthy about planning the Passover meal, Jesus returned to His normal habits. He hadn't wanted Judas to betray Him at the meal; now the time had come for the Lord to endure His agony leading up to, and on, the Cross. He went to exactly the spot He knew Judas would lead His captors.

"Gethsemane" is a compound word that means *olive press*. It was a working olive grove, with a press to crush the olives into olive oil.

Multitudes of Bible studies have been delivered regarding the comparison between the crushing of olives and the spiritual crushing of Jesus.

I can't add anything to them; I just make passing note of it as an incredibly symbolic stage for the drama that unfolds.

Jesus is going to take Peter, James, and John further with Him into Gethsemane. First He instructed eight of them to "sit here while I pray."

Let's call them the Waitful Eight.

I understand why very little is written or said about the Waitful Eight; but that doesn't mean they are insignificant in this account.

I'm going to suggest that they could have gotten more involved with the action, but instead remained overly passive in their obedience to Jesus.

Let's first set the scene. The Jews followed, and still follow, a lunar calendar. Passover *always* falls on the night of a full moon.

Why is that important to our discussion? Full moon over the Mount of Olives means lots of light. It means the eight, even though left further behind, would have been able to see Peter, James, and John, as well as Jesus.

Are you familiar with the term, "blocking," when used in the theater? **Lines** are what an actor says on stage; **blocking** is where and how an actor moves onstage. Blocking is largely determined by the director.

I see Jesus "blocking" this scene. It's an unfolding drama, on the stage of Gethsemane, and He put His 'actors,' *all eleven of them*, exactly where He wanted, and needed, them.

The eight who were blocked further out must have been there by God's design. The events of this night were too important for Jesus to overlook any detail.

We're not told what that design was, so I want to be careful, and not make-up anything. However, if we're careful, I think we can say a few instructive things about the Waitful Eight.

I sometimes wonder about one of them in particular. Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist, then obediently left to follow Jesus. He was used by God to introduce his brother, Peter, to Jesus.

Scholars always list him as being fourth in importance, after Peter, James, and John. James and John, by the way, were also brothers.

(It's possible that the other James in the group was Matthew's brother; Alphaeus is listed as father of each. We can't be certain because Alphaeus was a common name).

Peter and the brothers, James and John, got to attend some amazing events: They were in the room for the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead; they accompanied Jesus up the Mount of Transfiguration; and, now, they were closest to His agony in Gethsemane.

Why draw the line at three? Why one set of brothers, and not Andrew and Peter as well?

It is a bedrock principle that God is not a respecter of persons. He loves, and forgives, and showers His grace upon, all of His followers with equal passion.

We know, therefore, that it wasn't because of some flaw, or failing, in Andrew, or the others, that Jesus somehow chose Peter, James, and John.

The three in the inner circle didn't earn their spot. In fact, I think we could make a pretty good case that Peter was often a liability. It wasn't that he was more, or the most, spiritual of the bunch.

Your assignment is no indicator of God's pleasure, or displeasure, with you. It is simply the place where the Lord can most effectively conform you into the image of Jesus.

At least we are familiar with Andrew. Most of us are hard-pressed to name all eight of those who were told to "sit here while I pray."

Let's discuss their assignment. "Sit here while I pray." Does that command mean they were prohibited from doing anything else?

For example, they could see - in the light of the full moon - Peter, James, and John, nodding off to sleep. They probably had heard Jesus' instructions to the three, and Jesus' comments every time He came to them and found them sleeping.

Do you think it might have been a good thing if, say, Andrew, upon realizing his brother and the others were sleeping, went over to them to awaken them? Or at least threw stones at them?

Again, we can't say any of this for sure... But it is true, of us, that we can obey Jesus so passively that we fail to serve when an opportunity is right in front of us.

Jesus had given His disciples plenty of experience in this area. On His way to heal Jairus' daughter, the Lord had been stealthily touched by a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years.

Knowing the urgency of His mission to get to Jairus' house, Jesus nevertheless stopped to minister to the woman.

Jesus was always seeing some way of serving His Father. There was nothing passive about His approach.

Told to "sit and pray," the eight could have done more; but they apparently did not.

Do you think, later on, Peter got on his little brother, saying, "Andy, why didn't you wake me up? Don't you know how embarrassing it is to fall asleep on watch with Jesus? I could have used some help, bro."

We all have our individual assignments. We all have our gifts. Beyond them, we need to develop greater spiritual situational awareness, to overcome our naturally passive obedience to Jesus, and do more than the minimum.

We all know what a 'comfort zone' refers to. I'm saying we can also have a spiritual 'passive zone' that keeps us from serving.

Look around, with spiritual sight and insight, and serve the Lord.

#2 Are You Powerless To Obey Jesus? (v33-42)

Did your parents ever talk about the Sandman?

Not Spiderman's nefarious foe, but the mythical character in folklore who puts people to sleep and brings good dreams by sprinkling magical sand onto the eyes of people while they sleep at night.

He'd be justifiably shot as an intruder here in Kings County.

Peter, James, and John wanted to stay awake, but their eyelids grew heavier and heavier as the early morning hours progressed, and they missed-out on Jesus' incredible talk with His Father in Heaven.

Mar 14:33 And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed.

I struggle to expound upon the agony of Jesus. He was fully God and fully man, about to be nailed to the Cross where the Bible says He would be "made sin for us" (Second Corinthians 5:21). It's all beyond my comprehension; or at least beyond my ability to articulate.

I simply cannot fathom Jesus' trouble and distress. It is too deep, too intense, for any of my words.

Mar 14:34 Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch."

I find it interesting that even though what He must suffer, He must suffer alone, Jesus wanted company.

There is what is called "the ministry of presence," and we can all practice it. You will need the help of God the Holy Spirit to know what to say, and what not to say.

In Jesus' case, He didn't need advice, or to be told cliches, like, "It's all going to work out," or, "God is in control," or, "God won't give you more than you can handle."

He wanted them to be present, at a distance. Their presence would be enough to strengthen Him.

Mar 14:35 He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him.

Mar 14:36 And He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will."

God is omnipotent, but there are things even He cannot do, e.g.,

1. God cannot lie.
2. God cannot sin.
3. God cannot learn anything new.
4. God cannot be wrong.

The "hour" Jesus spoke of was probably the entire suffering that lie ahead of Him. Anyone facing what He was facing would want to escape it.

He called it "this cup." The cup is a familiar Old Testament symbol for God's judgment being poured-out upon sin.

Jesus knew His suffering and death couldn't be avoided, so why pray that way? For one thing, it highlights that His death on the Cross is the **only** way for mankind to be saved, and for creation to be restored. If there were any other way, then Jesus need not die.

There is no religion, or philosophy, that can conquer sin and death and Satan. No other name can save a lost human being besides the name of Jesus. No one can come to the Father, except by Him.

It takes great faith to say, "Nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will." It means you trust God to do what is best in your situation.

It doesn't mean you shouldn't ask for things like a healing, or a miracle. It simply means that you trust God to act in love, working all things together for the good.

Mar 14:37 Then He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour?"

The reference to "one hour" probably doesn't mean sixty-minutes, but to however long Jesus had been praying.

In sympathy for the boys, Luke's Gospel says they were groggy on account of their exceeding sorrow. They were physically and psychologically spent from everything Jesus had said up to this point.

You're going to have times in your life, maybe long seasons, even, when it seems as though what Jesus is telling you is hard to bear, nearly impossible to endure. You will be physically and psychologically spent - even with the Lord walking with you through it.

You can still have joy - a joy unspeakable and full of glory. But there will be times when you depend upon the Holy Spirit to interpret your deep groanings to God, because words fail to capture your pain and sorrow.

All three were asleep, but Jesus addressed Peter. Hey, if you want to lead, and if you're going to brag about being the one in the group who stands apart, then you'd better be ready to produce.

Jesus had changed Simon's name to "Peter," meaning *Rock*. (John 1:42). Why did Jesus occasionally call Peter "Simon" after He had changed His name to "Peter"?

Probably because Simon sometimes acted like his old self instead of the rock God called him to be.

In this case, Peter had claimed he was able to resist any attack. But he wasn't even capable of fending off the Sandman.

Mar 14:38 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Jesus knew Peter would fail; yet He encouraged him to victory, knowing that the resources are found in watching and praying.

Jesus knows I will fail; He knows you will fail. Our resources are in watching and praying. If we practice them, we will be prepared when the testing comes; we will be ready for the traps that are set.

The "spirit" which was willing refers to their human spirit, which we might call our mind, will, and emotions. They definitely wanted to do what the Lord asked.

"The flesh" refers to our unredeemed humanity. We are born with a sin nature and even after we are saved, the tendency to disobey God and to sin remains within us.

If the flesh wins out, how is it "weak?" Isn't it strong?

The flesh **is** strong. To paraphrase Darth Vader, we could say of just about any human being, "the flesh is strong with this one."

What Jesus meant is that if you try to accomplish something *spiritual* in the energy of the flesh, it will fail; you will fall. In that sense, it is weak. It is weak to produce anything spiritual.

Mar 14:39 Again He went away and prayed, and spoke the same words.

It doesn't mean Jesus recited the exact same prayer. It means He spoke in the same manner, along the same lines.

Jesus addressed God as "Abba, Father." It was an intimate, informal way of addressing God. He certainly wasn't reciting some formal prayer; or using vain repetitions, thinking He would be heard. He was talking to His Dad; to His Papa.

Mar 14:40 And when He returned, He found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him.

Round two was another loss for Peter, James, and John. "Heavy eyes" sounds like it was tough rousing them. I understand that all too well. Often Pam can't get me to wake-up so she must leave me in the living room to wake-up on my own. When I awaken, I try to keep my eyelids as closed as possible while I stumble off to bed.

"They did not know what to answer Him." Today we'd say they were busted. The Lord had already identified the flesh as the problem. No use offering-up any excuse.

Mar 14:41 Then He came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.

The commentators have very different opinions regarding the tone of Jesus' voice throughout this encounter with Peter, James, and John. For example, was He now chiding them, as some suggest? Or was this a tender comment, as He came upon them enjoying the last peaceful sleep they'd have for quite some time?

Kenneth Wuest, a renowned Greek scholar, translates it, "Keep on sleeping now and taking your rest."

I like that. I can hear Jesus saying that.

How do **you** receive the Lord's speaking to you, through the Word of God? Do you immediately assume He is chiding you? Or that He is being tender with you?

It makes a big difference, because that is also how you will share the Lord with others.

"It is enough!," exclaimed Jesus. He meant something like, "It is time!"

Whenever I had to wake-up the kids, I'd always say something like, "Wake up! It's time to go to school." That's what Jesus was doing for His guys.

"The hour" had come for Him to be the Lamb led to the slaughter as the substitute for all mankind, as the sacrifice for our sins. It wasn't a moment Jesus had been preparing for just thirty-plus years. **He'd been preparing for it from eternity past.**

Before the foundations of the earth were laid, God knew His creation would be plummeted into sin by the disobedience of the man and woman He would create with free will to choose.

Why not create mankind without free will? It's another thing that is impossible for God.

We maintain that it would be impossible for God to create a being in His image, with the capacity to love, if they had no free will to choose.

Mar 14:42 Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."

Physically, Jesus was much more exhausted than His disciples. Yet He had managed to stay up well into the next day in order to seek His Father in prayer.

Luke, who was a physician, in his account wrote, "And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground (22:44).

Jesus didn't act exhausted. He continued to 'block' the scene, as its director. He got into position to meet the captors so He could surrender to them, while simultaneously putting His men in a safe place.

His praying had prepared Jesus for what was to come. His great agony in Gethsemane gave Him the spiritual strength to endure the hours of suffering that lie ahead.

The difference between Jesus and the eleven wasn't that He was God, and that they were men. While He was on the earth, Jesus voluntarily set aside the prerogatives of His deity and acted as a man.

The difference between Jesus and the eleven was the power of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' life.

These same guys, after Jesus rose from the dead, would be told to wait in Jerusalem until they received power from Heaven. On the Day of Pentecost, that promised power came upon them in the Person of the permanently indwelling Holy Spirit.

This same Peter had no Simon-like weakness in preaching the Gospel. The eleven plus a twelfth they chose, Matthias, went on to turn the world upside-down with the Gospel. Their boldness is still reverberating through the centuries, right up to here and now.

I don't want to completely excuse the eleven for their lack of power. While it is true that the Holy Spirit was not indwelling them, nor had He yet come upon them in a Pentecost-sense, they could have known His empowering.

They were arguably better off than any of their Old Testament heroes, having been companions of Jesus. Heroes like Joshua and Caleb and David, who each experienced the Holy Spirit coming upon them to accomplish mighty deeds.

The eleven could have watched... Could have prayed... In the power of the Holy Spirit. Instead they were powerless when they needed Him the most.

How much more do we have power. If you've been born-again, God the Holy Spirit indwells you, permanently. He doesn't come and go.

In addition, like the original disciples on the Day of Pentecost, the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon you is your promise, too.

In fact Jesus specifically tells us to ask for the Holy Spirit's power to come upon us:

Luk 11:13 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

Jesus was addressing believers, encouraging them, and us, to "ask" for the Holy Spirit.

In our quiet closing time, talk to Jesus about any passive obedience there may be in your life...

Ask Him for the Holy Spirit to be poured-out upon you, for boldness to obey Him...

If you are not yet a believer in Jesus Christ, you can receive the forgiveness of your sins. Jesus is your Lamb; He took your place, dying for your sins, to save you.