

ARE WE SLEEPING?

by Carl McMurray

And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Mark 14:32-38 ESV)

Three things amaze me about the passage above. One is that Jesus admonishes the disciples personally and with what seems to be great pleading, and yet twice more he comes and they're sound asleep. Some friends, we might say they turned out to be. The second surprising thing about this account is that in the verse previous, v. 31, Peter insists that he would die for Jesus if need be. Really? He would die for the Lord, but can't stay awake for him when specifically asked to do so? The third amazing thing to me about this passage is that we have all (including myself) read it or heard it read before, and yet we don't seem to do much better than those disciples did.

We gather together regularly and sing about loving the Lord and how much he means to us. We pray in his name and we eat his body and blood and remind ourselves that we should love him because he loved us so much that he died for us. But then, we go back to sleep.

Are we sleeping when our kids are growing up? Do we enforce homework rules while we ignore Bible class studies? Do we get excited about sports while we talk about "having to go to church"? Do we talk about loving the brethren, when we're not talking them down, but fail to ever show our children our acts of service that demonstrate love? I wonder how many times during the rest of the lives of Peter, James, and John, they thought back to that night when they slept as their friend needed their support. How many times did they regret those heavy eyelids and wish they could do that all over again. Oh, how they would do it differently if they just had another chance, knowing of course, what they knew later. In the same way how many parents turn around and find their children independent and grown so quick. Now those children are more interested in sports than spirituality and they express little interest in being around the assembling of saints. How much regret do their parents feel, and how many times and to how many people do they admit their "sleepiness" during those years and how they wish they could do it all over. Parents, NOW is the time to wake up. Jesus is calling upon fathers to train and discipline and upon mothers to be present at home and love those children mightily.

Are we sleeping when doors of opportunity open in front of us? An acquaintance is facing some sort of trial that a spiritual family, directed by Jesus, might be able to help and thus secure a place in their heart, but we remain silent, asleep in the moment. A guest visits our worship service, awkward, and feeling out

of place, and we chat with our friends instead of making those guests feel welcomed. We're asleep when Jesus is asking for our welcoming smile and friendly handshake and warm invitation to "come sit with us." A friend's heart is breaking for some reason and we are too busy to stop and offer to pray for them and give them a listening ear, in the name of Jesus. Again, we're sleeping when Jesus needs our help to reach out. We may get a chance to encourage, uplift, or build up with kind and gracious words and we instead go about our business, remain silent, or even worse, we criticize. We're asleep when our friend is asking us to stay awake.

I have never seen the congregation where the elders made an announcement of having too many teachers wanting to teach; where they said everyone was just going to have settle down and wait their turn, have you? We have opportunities to teach, or help others teach, or to host Bible studies in our homes where someone else may teach, and instead we busy ourselves with Pampered Chef parties, PTA meetings, sports activities, and so many other worldly duties. Jesus has asked us to remain awake and prayerful, as his friends. Just for a short time we have these opportunities to stand by him. Are we sleeping...?