

Are You Sleeping?

On March 19, 2005, a resident at an extended-care facility in British Columbia died. The ambulance came and dutifully transported an elderly woman to the morgue. Unfortunately, the driver failed to check the woman's wristband for identification and carried off the wrong woman. The 87-year-old woman he wheeled away was simply sleeping. In fact, she was such a sound sleeper that she didn't even wake up after she was transferred to a gurney in the morgue!

Meanwhile, back at the nursing home, the staff noticed that the deceased resident was still in her bed but her roommate was gone! Fortunately, a phone call alerted the morgue of the mistake before any real damage could be done.ⁱ

Physical sleep is a wonderful invention of God. It is critical to good health, just ask anyone you know who's having a hard time falling or staying asleep at night. But in our passage today, Jesus uses the term "sleep" in a spiritual sense. In our spiritual lives, sleep is never a good thing. Our spirits don't ever need sleep. Being asleep spiritually isn't just being lazy, it's being rebellious; it's synonymous with having the wrong priorities, with working against the will of God.

In our passage today, Jesus has spent 31 verses describing what the end of the age will look like and it's not a pretty picture! In two weeks we'll study these first 31 verses of Mark 13 in more detail, but today we want to pay attention to the two things Jesus says we should be doing while we're waiting for Him to return. First, Jesus says we should...

I. Be Watching (Not Sleeping).

Let's listen to what Jesus said from the New American Standard translation: **But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come.** (Mark 13:32-33)

So, if anyone tells you that he knows when Jesus is returning, don't believe him. If you see a book that says, "Jesus will return by (fill in the date)," don't buy that book. If you hear a speaker say, "I've figured out the secret code! I know when Jesus will return!!" stop listening to that speaker. No one means no one! Jesus doesn't even know! "But why," you say, "why won't God tell us?"

Come on! Really? You don't know why? Have you ever said to your son or daughter, "I have to run a few errands, but I want your room to be clean by the time I get back." What's their next question? "When will you be back?" Right? Why do they ask that question? BECAUSE THEY WANT TO KNOW HOW LONG THEY CAN GOOF OFF before they have to START cleaning their room!!!

God doesn't just want us to call Him Father because He likes the name. He wants us to call Him Father because He's a really, really good Father! He loves us but He knows our weaknesses and He wants us to succeed not fail, so He's not going to do anything that plays into our weaknesses. (Fathers and mothers: take note!)

So, three times in six verses, Jesus tells us to keep watch and He ends by saying:

...do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: "Watch!" (Mark 13:36-37)

Some people have tried to say that "watching" is a requisite of salvation. In other words, if you don't "keep watch," you could lose your salvation. They say this because in verse 13 Jesus says:

All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (Mark 13:13)

For one thing, I believe this verse is talking about the Great Tribulation period when we won't be here. But theologically, this is simply another way of describing the connection between words and works. James says that, "*...faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*" (James 2:17) Jesus said:

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. (Matt. 7:15-16)

Ultimately, we can't know for sure if anyone else is saved. We can't see into anyone's soul. But Jesus says we can get a pretty good idea by the fruit being produced in their life. A "watcher" will have a life that is filled overwhelmingly with behavior in obedience to God. A "non-watcher" will have a life filled overwhelmingly with disobedience to God. An apple tree might have a rotten apple once in a while but it won't be half apples and half lemons. "Standing firm" doesn't mean perfection. It means, "in which direction are you moving?"

And this is why we need one another! We need one another to keep moving in the right direction, to not sit down, to not drop back and start mingling with the crowd. We need each other to keep watch!

According to **Major David Dixon**, recently retired from the U. S. Marine Corps, from day one all Marines are taught to live a life worthy of a Marine AND they are taught to hold one another accountable to that standard. Dixon says:

If the Marine next to you is falling asleep in class, you must have the moral courage to wake him up and motivate him to stay awake. If you are caught sleeping in class... not only do you get in trouble for laziness, but the Marines to your left and your right get in trouble for lack of moral courage because they should have corrected you when you were in the wrong. ⁱⁱ

That's what Jesus taught in Matt. 18 when He said if someone sins against you, go to him first. Don't go to the pastor. Have the moral courage to go to him first and as Gal. 6:1 says, "*...you who are spiritual should restore him gently.*" Jesus' first word here is that we must "keep watch" and help each other to keep watch until He returns. Sleeping is behavior "unbecoming" of an officer.

But He has a second assignment for us as we wait for Him to return. He says that we should not only be watching (not sleeping) but we must...

II. Be Working (Not Goofing Off!)

In the middle of this passage, Jesus tells this mini-parable. He says:

It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner

of the house will come back – whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone, “Watch!”

(Mk. 13:34-37)

Okay, so let’s get back to the basics. What’s the definition of the word sleep?

Sleep: *The natural state of rest during which... you become unconscious.*

And what’s the definition of work?

Work: Exertion or effort directed to produce or accomplish something.

So, sleep is rest and work is exertion and they are polar opposites, antonyms to one another. This means, of course, that you can’t be working while you sleep. And Jesus is telling us that until He comes again, He expects us to be working, each at our “assigned task,” not sleeping. And what is our “assigned task”? Jesus said:

- **And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.** (Mk. 13:10)
- **Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...** (Matt. 28:19)
- **This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations...** (Luke 24:46-47)

And what will be the result of this ministry to all nations? The apostle John, the writer of the fourth gospel, records the results in what Jesus revealed to him in The Revelation of Jesus Christ:

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. (Rev. 21:22-24)

Some Christians say, “Look, I’m just not called to minister cross-culturally. My gifts work best here in this culture.” No, No, NO!!! You’re not listening! That’s NOT what Jesus said! Jesus does not give you that option! This assignment is for every Christian. I’m not saying every Christian must GO to another nation, but you must be INVOLVED in the going. Minimally, every Christian should be praying and giving and going or helping someone else to go. All four gospel writers confirm this! Cross-cultural ministry MUST be part of every Christian’s life or else!! Or else? Or else what? Or else you are sleeping – you’ve dropped into spiritual unconsciousness!! And whatever gospel you ARE preaching, it isn’t a full, complete gospel. It’s a junk-food gospel – full of empty calories that make you feel full but have very little nutrition.

Instead, you should be an “All Nations” Christian. What does it mean to be an “All Nations” Christian? Do you have to become a tele-evangelist or learn a dozen languages or become some kind of a super theologian? No, you just have to stay awake spiritually and do your part without quitting. Let me illustrate with a story...

In 1983, Australia hosted an ultra-marathon, a 573.7 mile foot race from Sydney to Melbourne. This is a race that takes DAYS to run, and professionals from all over the world came to participate. Shortly before the race began, a 61-year-old farmer named Cliff Young, wearing overalls and galoshes over his boots, walked up to the registration table and requested a number to enter the race. The people at the

table thought it was a joke, that someone was setting them up, so they laughed. But Cliff said, “No, I’d really like to run.” So they gave him a number and pinned it on his overalls.

Cliff walked over to the starting line along with the other elite runners who were decked out in their running regalia and who looked at him like he was crazy. When the gun went off, the elite runners unfurled their sculpted bodies into rhythmic strides like a flock of birds rising from a field. Not Cliffy. He didn’t even run like a runner! Cliff’s running motion was more like an awkward shuffle. All through the crowd, people were snickering and laughing out loud. Finally, one guy yelled, “Get that old fool off the track!”

Five days, 14 hours and four minutes later, at 1:25 a.m., Cliff Young shuffled across the finish line. He had won the race! And he didn’t win by a matter of minutes or even an hour or two. The second place runner in his neoprene running shorts and \$1,000 running shoes, was nine hours and 56 minutes behind a 61-year-old farmer! Cliff had set a new world record for the ultra-marathon! How in the world had he done it? What was his secret? Cliff Young had shuffled his way into the record books by never sleeping. The other runners would run for 18 hours straight and then sleep for three or four. At twice the other runners’ ages, Cliff ran slow, awkwardly and with no sense of rhythm or stride – but Cliff simply never stopped. He just kept going until he finished the race. ⁱⁱⁱ

We have a goal this year of \$1,000,000 for our Faith Promise budget. This is crazy, right? I mean, we’ve already asked you to dig deep for expanding ministry here through our Grace and Mercy Movement and you did dig deep. But how could we possibly do this again?

Well, I’ll tell you how. We can do it if we all just take a number and start shuffling toward the finish line. While you’re shuffling, remember these three facts. First, Jesus tells us to do this. We’ve got to be “All Nations” Christians or else we’re just sleeping ‘til He comes. Secondly, as I said in November, we have 1848 giving units in this church (families, couples, singles). In the Grace and Mercy Campaign about 450 families participated. That means approximately 1200 giving units haven’t responded yet. We need 100% participation to accomplish what Jesus is asking of us. And YOU need to join in. We normally get about 400 Faith Promise cards each year. Seriously, we need 1200 cards this year. We need 1200 “All Nations” Christians to respond with a \$700 Faith Promise to reach our goal.

Thirdly, the most important fact is this - it’s more about faith than money. The video we showed just before I spoke is real. Those weren’t actors. They’re from a church out west. But just since November, I’ve had at least three families tell me they experienced the exact same thing. Back then, I asked you to consider giving by faith \$800 and two families did not have \$800 to give but they decided by faith to trust God to provide the money for them and both of them saw God miraculously provide \$800 within a few weeks of their stepping out by faith.

Do you want to become an “All Nations” Christians? Here’s your first move, take a step of faith. I’m not the one challenging you in this – God is! God says:

...“Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.” (Malachi 3:10)

Take Him up on it! Take the step! Here's how: take one of the Faith Promise Cards right in front of you. While you pray and consider how big a step to take, I want you to see this video. Most of you know that my son Adam is going to Zimbabwe, one of the poorest nations in Africa. Singer/composer, Sara Groves, also has a heart for some of the difficult places in Africa. She visited Rwanda, a nation just north of Zimbabwe, and she wrote a song about what she experienced there. It's called, *I saw what I saw*. Please listen and watch as you pray and fill out your card.

[Play video *I saw what I saw*]

Let's pray...

ⁱ www.cbc.ca/story/canada/national/2005/03/21/sleeping-dead0321

ⁱⁱ Michael Wheeler, "Marines Don't Do That,": Mastering the Split-Second Decision, Linked In blog (12-16-13)

ⁱⁱⁱ PreachingToday, "61-Year-Old Sheep Herder Wins the Australian Ultramarathon," 8/29/2011