

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon Title: The Sleeping Disciples, Mark 14:32-41

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INTRODUCTION: As we approach Resurrection Sunday, I'll pick up in the Book of Mark, Chapter 14. I delayed preaching some sections of Mark during my series on the Book of Mark. And, of course, I did that because I wanted to save them for sermons around the holiday.

We now see Jesus' discipling of his followers is coming to a close. He had taught them diligently, and now they were with him in his final days. Just before this, he'd had his last supper with them, which we commemorate once each month. He'd predicted Peter's upcoming denial and Judas's upcoming betrayal. All of these are topics I've taught you. Long time Christians have heard these stories many times and should be able to tell them to others.

OVERVIEW: The three points to today's message are:

1. The disciples slept when Jesus wanted them to stay awake.
2. The disciples couldn't justify their sleep.
3. When Jesus yelled, they didn't sleep any longer.

First, THE DISCIPLES SLEPT WHEN JESUS WANTED THEM TO STAY AWAKE.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 14:32-38 ³² *They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray."* ³³ *He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.* ³⁴ *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."*

³⁵ *Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ “Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”*

³⁷ *Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? ³⁸ Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

EXPLANATION: Jesus was frustrated they fell asleep. This is interesting to me because Jesus knew what it was to be fully human. He knew what it was to be sleepy. Jesus’ response indicates to me they could have stayed awake but didn’t. They could have asked Jesus to give them the power to stay awake. After all, they had seen him perform miracles. The question was: were they spiritually asleep?

ILLUSTRATION: I must say, I hope you remember my messages after they are preached. I’ve dozed off during a sermon or two. But, as a preacher, I want you to know the daily grind of the ministry and the unglamorous work of intense study takes time, discipline, and determination. Normally, I don’t delve in this direction, but many people have opinions on what their preachers should be doing. What many don’t realize is Sunday is always coming, and Wednesday is always coming. And, the preaching and teaching must be prepared. Last week a friend of mine, who is in college, posted on Facebook she had writer’s block and couldn’t get with it on a paper she was writing. I posted, “Imagine having to deliver more than one fresh sermon per week.” Preachers don’t have time for writer’s block.

APPLICATION: I don’t say this for a pat on the back...but I can understand what was on Jesus’ mind at this point in the narrative. Had they paid attention to the lessons he taught them? Had they understood the meaning behind the parables and Jesus’ teaching? Did they realize he would not be with them much longer? Did they realize they would be the ones to carry on what he’d told them? He had prepared them well. But were they listening? I think this is on the mind of every shepherd of every flock. What happened next?

Second, THE DISCIPLES COULDN’T JUSTIFY THEIR SLEEP.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 14:39-40 ³⁹ *Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. ⁴⁰ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.*

EXPLANATION: It's difficult for us to get angry with the disciples who couldn't pull an all-nighter. When I'm sleepy, I go quickly, like within a few minutes. All the studies which say you are asleep for a while before you dream — they are wrong. As soon as I fall asleep, I dream. If it's just a brief nap, I will completely lose track of time because I've been around the world five times.

But, something was different with their sleep. For Jesus to believe they should have stayed awake, it means they could have. For them to be speechless when he woke them, indicates embarrassment.

I wonder what they thought: "Oh, it's just Jesus, full of mercy and compassion; he'll forgive us if we sleep." I wonder what the disciples dreamed about when they slept.

APPLICATION: Folks, from a spiritual perspective, let's not sleep. When we sleep physically, we are oblivious to what's around us. Did you know you can be asleep spiritually when your eyes are wide open?

ILLUSTRATION: Let me share with you a story about a group of people who chose to sleep spiritually—so much so they ignored what was going on around them. An old German man told it like it was:

[copied] "I lived in Germany during the Nazi holocaust. I considered myself a Christian. I attended church since I was a small boy. We had heard the stories of what was happening to the Jews, but like most people today in this country, we tried to distance ourselves from the reality of what was really taking place. What could anyone do to stop it?"

A railroad track ran behind our small church, and each Sunday morning, we would hear the whistle from a distance and then the clacking of the wheels moving over the track. We became disturbed when one Sunday we noticed cries coming from the

train as it passed by. We grimly realized that the train was carrying Jews. They were like cattle in those cars!

Week after week that train whistle would blow. We would dread to hear the sound of those old wheels because we knew that the Jews would begin to cry out to us as they passed our church. It was so terribly disturbing! We could do nothing to help these poor miserable people, yet their screams tormented us. We knew exactly at what time that whistle would blow, and we decided the only way to keep from being so disturbed by the cries was to start singing our hymns. By the time that train came rumbling past the church yard, we were singing at the top of our voices. If some of the screams reached our ears, we'd just sing a little louder until we could hear them no more. Years have passed, and no one talks about it much anymore, but I still hear that train whistle in my sleep. I can still hear them crying out for help. God forgive all of us who called ourselves Christians, yet did nothing to intervene.

APPLICATION: You see it's possible to sleep with your eyes open. DON'T SLEEP THROUGH THE OBVIOUS. Don't sleep when you know you should do something. Let's read, Verses 39 through 40 once again.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 14:39-40 ³⁹ *Once more he went away and prayed the same thing.* ⁴⁰ *When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.*

Third, WHEN JESUS YELLED, THEY DIDN'T SLEEP ANY LONGER.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 14: 41-42 ⁴¹ *Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners.* ⁴² *Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"*

EXPLANATION: Sleep no longer mattered now. The disciples were fully awake and wouldn't sleep for a quite a while. And, it would be a long time before they'd have a restful night's sleep again, if ever.

Whatever Jesus wanted them to learn from him that night in the Garden of Gethsemane they would never learn. It was an opportunity missed.

ILLUSTRATION: I know a woman who aspired to have a particular career. She met the educational requirements and met with two professionals who did the hiring in the job she wanted. They gave her solid advice. They gave her specific steps, which would land her the job she wanted. They told her about their journeys. They told the number of years it had taken them to get to where they were. It wouldn't be easy, but because they'd given her specific directions, there was no doubt she'd get the job if she followed their advice.

But, no, she wanted to get there the easier way. She stayed in touch with the two who coached her, and they reminded her of what she needed to do. She refused to do it, and when she graduated from graduate school, she applied for the job, and guess what? She didn't get it. She applied with their competitor and didn't get the job either.

Had she been alert through that coaching session, she would have gained so much, but *she intentionally slept through the advice the men gave her*. In the end, one of the two men became irritated and was very forthright to her about how she didn't listen. She scrambled to get the experience but it was too late. She had missed a critical deadline.

As the disciples awoke from their stupor, the scene changed immediately. Jesus was betrayed by Judas. He was handed over to the authorities, and the disciples scattered in fear.

CONCLUSION: The Gethsemane experience — when people talk about that, they usually mean Jesus' Gethsemane experience at the place where Jesus surrendered any human will left in him to his father's will. But, I am proposing another Gethsemane experience to you today...and that is staying spiritually alert when sleep beckons with its strong call.

We've been lulled to sleep spiritually in a nation with so many immature believers who believe if they just pray hard enough they'll be prosperous. Terry Taylor gave me two CDs to listen to by a Presbyterian preacher named Eugene Peterson. He believes in this nation of religious freedom, we have a higher percentage of baby Christians than any other nation.

I'll tell you what Gethsemane experience the disciples missed. They missed the Savior in agony. Perhaps they would have heard Jesus pray for them about the trials they would soon face. But, they missed it. They missed Jesus, the Messiah, in agony as he prepared to pay for the sins of the world.

Here's what the Gethsemane experience is: it is embracing the agony of Jesus and realizing the Christian life is not easy. If Jesus suffered, his followers will suffer. If Jesus surrendered to the will of God, then his followers must surrender.

Jesus doesn't need disciples who sleep but those who are awake!

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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