

Title: “That Night the Disciples Slept”

Chris Ryan

Matthew 26:39

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Service Readings: Hebrews 5:1-10, Matthew 26:36-46

Jesus prepared for the ultimate battle.... And the disciples slept.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Gethsemane would be the place of preparation for the ultimate conflict that had started in another garden, many years before. There, in the Garden of Eden would the war begin. There, among God’s glorious, new creation. And it would not be fought between man and Satan but between man and God. Not that Satan was an innocent party to the opening shot, but the trigger had been pulled by man, not him. This was the first battle. It was a battle that led man to a tree, not to overcome sin but to introduce it into God’s perfect creation. From that moment on, the war would rage: God on one side, man and Satan on the other. And across time there would be many battles but none as important as the one that played out on that day – the one that started it all. Not a single one, until the night in Gethsemane.

That night the disciples slept, exhausted with worry and despair over the predictions that Jesus had foretold. And while they slept, Jesus prepared for a battle that would end the war. This would be the most important battle across all time. And it would be a battle not against God and man, but against God and Satan. It would be a battle for the eternal soul of mankind. And it would lay claim to that soul. It would *reclaim* that soul back to its rightful owner. This is what was on the line. This is what Jesus was preparing for. And his battle cry was this: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” To the world, this is a battle cry of weakness, even of fear. It is something that man would strike out of the history books for it has no place upon the lips of heroes as they ride into war. But Jesus is not of this world but instead the creator of it. He is not preparing for any battle but *the* battle. It would be a fight that would take him to a tree. But unlike Adam, it would not introduce sin but to overcome it, defeat it. He would travel, not to pick its fruit but become the fruit – a fruit that would nourish and forgive the souls of all who believe. He would become the fruit that didn’t bring death but instead brought life.

“Not *my* will but yours be done.” This was the battle cry of Jesus. And it stood in direct opposition to the first battle cry that sprang from the lips of man: “Not *your* will but *mine* be done.”

And that night the disciples slept. Unaware of what lay on the line for them. Unaware of the strength that was on display through the bloody sweat of their master, their Lord, their Savior. In their midst was the ultimate warrior dressed in the armor of obedience, armed with the shield of complete trust in the Father. Jesus would go where his Father would lead him – even to death. But it was not just death that he would experience, but the judgement for the sins of the world. He

would feel the separation that only he could bear. He would see God's face turn from him as he drank from the cup of God's judgement. "let this cup pass," he would pray, but he would know that it would not. He would know that it *could* not. He would know that it *must* not. For if God were to be victorious, if God were to reclaim his prize, Jesus would have to enter into this battle. And Jesus *wanted* to. He *wanted* to with all his strength, and might. He *wanted* to with all his love. And so he did, willingly. He drank from the cup of God's wrath.

That night Jesus prepared and the disciples slept. Their spirit willing, but their flesh weak. This was a battle only Jesus could fight and so he didn't call Peter or the disciples to follow him. He didn't include them in his battle cry or preparations. The blood to be shed was to be Christ's blood, alone. He was to be the only sacrifice, offered up for the sins of the entire world. And so he prayed to his father for strength. He prayed because the path out of the garden would be one that he would walk alone. His disciples would desert him and his father would separate himself from him.

<pause>

But what of us? Do we sleep in the Garden of Gethsemane? Do we sleep like the disciples? That night they didn't understand the prophecies of Jesus and so they exhausted themselves in worry. They hadn't yet lived beyond the cross or Christ's resurrection. They were still in the garden, still fighting a battle they were *unaware* they were even waging. They were unaware that they were fighting God, unaware that what they were fighting for was a prize of damnation that awaited them if they won. Eventually they would come to understand, and through that understanding they would leave the garden and live in the knowledge of Christ's work. They would carry the message of victory to the four corners of the Earth. Their battle cry would be one of good news - of death and resurrection. And the battles that they would fight would be fought in the realization that the war had already been won and that they had been reclaimed by their creator. And they would walk gladly to their graves for they would know that death would no longer await them but, instead life everlasting with Jesus, their conqueror. But tonight, they didn't know any of that and so tonight they slept.

And so I ask again, what of us? Are we telling ourselves that we are not sleeping? Are we telling ourselves that we are acting more like Jesus than the disciples? That we are imitating Christ through our prayer life? Make no mistake this passage is not a call to imitate him. It is not to present a model for us to follow, for we cannot. If we could, then what good is Jesus? No. This passage is a about a declaration of war, a show of strength from the Lord our God. Where we are weak, God is strong. Where we have failed, God has won. Jesus does not ask us to follow as he prepares to travel the road through hell to victory. That is his to travel, alone. It is his to fight, alone. It is his to win, alone. No! The cross that he calls us to bear is not his cross but one that he gives us, for what he bears we cannot.

As strong as we want to be, as strong as we tell ourselves that we are, we are more like Peter than Jesus. Do you recall this event? It happens just prior to tonight's passage:

Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night... Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." 34 Jesus said to

him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." 35 Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!"

He stood tall. He stood confident, but you know what happens with him that night. You see, his voice was bold but his body was weak. We are like Peter. We stand firm in our faith, bold in our confidence, but it so quickly comes tumbling to the ground in times of struggle. We exhaust ourselves with worry and flee from God's promise of protection. Our voice is bold but our body is weak. But where we are weak, Jesus is strong. And it is in his strength that we experience victory.

And so I ask a third time, what of us? Where are we living? Are we still in the garden, asleep? Are we living like Jesus is still preparing for battle? Are we worried about tomorrow? Unsure about the work of Christ? Unsure about what will happen to us because of our association with him? Are we ready to flee him and run to ourselves as the enemies of life approach?

Why? Why do we remain in the garden and not live on the other side of the sacrifice? Jesus has died! Jesus has risen! Jesus has won! Wake up! Pack your things and leave the garden, for there is nothing left to stay for! The garden is empty, the war is won. There is nothing left to worry about. Live in the freedom that you have received!

Our Lord, Jesus Christ has suffered and *died* for our sins. God has entered his creation to fix what we have broken. To fix *all* that we have broken. He is not selective in what he repairs. Your sins have not been excluded because they are unforgivable. They have been *included* in his sacrifice so that they can be forgiven. So turn it all over to him. Withhold nothing! For by doing so, you diminish the sacrifice that he paid to win you back. And why would you do that? "Not my will, but yours be done," he prayed to God. And God's will was that *your* sins, all of them, would be forgiven. Jesus offered his body as a living sacrifice to fulfill God's will. Why would you want to minimize that?

This is how God loved the world, that he gave Jesus as a sacrifice, for you, so that you would not perish but share life eternal with God.

Why, then? Why would you want to stay in the garden? Go live in the freedom of the victory that he won for you.

Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name;
make known among the nations what he has done. (Psalm 105:1)

Please pray with me.

³ All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. ⁴ Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵ God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. ⁶ So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. ⁷ He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. ⁸ He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.