

POWER

“. . . the gospel . . . is the power of God unto salvation . . .” (Romans 1:16)

WHEN PETER WENT TO SLEEP IN CLASS *(Luke 9:28-35, Matt. 26: 36-46)*

by Clark Sims

Peter and the other disciples had sat in the "classroom" with Jesus as their teacher for three years. Jesus embraced that role. In fact, it seems much of His emphasis during that earthly ministry was in the teaching and training of His followers.

The passage in Matthew 5:2 leading in to the grand "Sermon on the Mount" says, "Then He opened His mouth and taught them" (NKJV). The rich young ruler ran up to Jesus with the words, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17). One of His disciples in Luke 11:1, after hearing Him pray, said, "Lord, teach us to pray." Peter himself understood his role at the feet of a "Good Teacher." He said in John 6:68, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

In the early days, when Jesus gave instructions concerning a fishing expedition, Peter replied in Luke 5:5, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." Sadly, even at the betrayal and arrest of Jesus, Judas Iscariot mocked Him by saying, "Greetings, Rabbi" (Matt. 26:49). Rabbi is a word that means "teacher." Being a teacher was simply a part of the identity of Jesus. Peter was so fortunate to be numbered in the group as one of His pupils.

While I know Peter going to sleep in our text verses does not reflect favorably on him, I do not want to be too hard on him. I am not sure we would be any different in the same situations. Jesus led His disciples in a very busy lifestyle. Both of the contexts we will discuss today represent very intense moments in time. Along with that, they had experienced draining activity immediately preceding these moments.

Peter, along with his fellow disciples, was tired. They were weary and they had earned that sleep. However, Jesus was tired, too. He did not waste a minute in His yesterdays, and His tomorrow represented a time like no other this world has known. Jesus needed Peter. He needed him to be alert and strong. He needed him to focus on the current events that would go with Peter and the others throughout their lives. Likely, Peter fought it.

Have you been there? Likely he struggled in that moment that we all know between being awake and going to sleep. Ultimately, he lost the battle. His eyes grew heavy and he went to sleep. When his teacher really needed him to be awake, he went to sleep.

Fresh in the memory of Peter, James, and John as they made their way up the mountain to pray was the powerful confession of Peter to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16) and Jesus' declaration shortly thereafter "upon this rock I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18). A very real conflict was taking place within the minds of the disciples as they longed for a physical kingdom while Jesus continued to emphasize a spiritual one. The events that would take place on that mountain could shape the minds of the disciples toward a spiritual understanding--that is, if they could stay awake.

Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease (departure) which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him.

Then it happened, as they were parting from Him, that Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Luke 9:28-35).

When Peter Went to Sleep In Class, His Teacher Was Glorified

The carpenter's son who went on the mountain to pray began showing the form of deity. This is God's Son! His face was altered and His robe became white and glistening. It was a spiritual presence where He was joined in conversation by men of yesterday, Moses and Elijah. Peter, you do not want to miss this. Your Teacher is truly very special. When he fully woke up, he saw Jesus in His glory. He saw the men with Him. He recognized who they were. He had an idea. On the surface, it appeared to be a good idea. However, his idea revealed he still did not grasp who His Teacher really was. The voice of God, coming from a cloud, is about to make clear just who this Teacher really is.

When Peter Went To Sleep In Class, His Teacher Was Magnified And Identified

"This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Luke 9:35). The words were very similar to the words of the Father as He sent His Son off to begin His earthly ministry. But this time there was one addition. This time the Father added, "Hear Him!" (Luke 9:35b). Peter needed to hear those words. Peter had been raised on the words of Moses, the lawgiver. The Father makes clear that His Son brings new words, a new law with His complete approval. The One who was wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger in a barn because there was no room in the inn is being magnified and identified by the Creator of the universe. You do not need to sleep through these kinds of moments.

All of our study to this point brings us to this garden. It is in this garden that the pupil faces his most significant test to date. His Teacher needs him. We see a side of the Teacher in the garden we have not seen before. The pupil has heard his teacher speak of His upcoming death many times, but this time is different. Frankly, this time the Teacher is so different. You can see it on His

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face and hear it in His voice. They have just left an upper room where the pupil had promised the teacher he would never leave His side. He affirmed he would go to prison or even die before he would leave the Lord alone.

Words like these were meant when they were stated, but somehow they appear to be fading as a weary pupil joins his teacher and two other pupils deep in the garden. We learn some things about the Teacher as He takes that special group of pupils further into the garden. As we consider the Teacher and His pupils who went to sleep, it is important for us to remember with everything said, with everything done in that garden, our souls were hanging in the balance. What happened there affects us today, in 2009, and directly affects us as we face eternity. Surely weak men will stay awake for a time like this. You would think they would.

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand" (Matt. 26:36-46).

When Peter Went To Sleep In Class, We See His Teacher Was Human

John starts out with words reminding us that the Teacher was with God in the beginning. "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3). But, before you get to the bottom of the page, you are also told this: The Teacher became "flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). We saw it when He was weary sitting at a well in Samaria. We saw it when He was weeping at the tomb of a very close friend. We saw it when He faced temptation in every way like we do. We saw it when he was hungry. We saw it when He was thirsty. We saw it when He spent time with friends. But, when He got to that garden, we saw His humanity on a level much different than we had seen before from Him.

Like a man sitting in a hospital waiting room needing friends to "just sit with him," the Teacher pleads with these three pupils to simply "watch with Me" (Matt. 26:38). The humanity of the Teacher is really facing a struggle. There is a very real battle going on between what He wants and what we all need. We are not fair to the Teacher when we make

the moments in this garden easy for Him. At this low point, He called on a group of weak, weary men for support.

When Peter Went To Sleep In Class, We See His Teacher Was Hurting

The view was different this time for the pupil. He had witnessed the compassion of the Teacher many times toward people who were hurting. He saw Him take care of thousands who were hungry and one business man who had climbed a tree. This time, though, it is the Teacher who is hurting. He told the pupils, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me" (Matt. 26:38). He told His Father, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me" (Matt. 26:29). He had always known this moment was coming. Before Eve took one bite of the forbidden fruit, He knew this moment was coming. Before the words "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities...and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" were ever penned in Isaiah 53, He knew this

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moment was coming (Isa. 53:5-6). However, that did not make the moment's reality any easier to embrace. After he poured out His heart to His Father, He went back to the pupils and found them asleep. You can hear the hurt in His voice. "Could you not watch with Me one hour" (Matt. 26:40)?

When Peter Went To Sleep In Class, We See His Teacher Was Hoping

Is it possible? Is there any other way? Does it have to be like this? The side of Him that had been with the Father throughout creation knew the answer, but the side that cried and thirsted and got hungry was desperate. Remember with every question asked the destiny of your soul is swaying back and forth. Do not miss the reality. He did not want to do this. His language indicated He was ready for "any other way."

The family is concerned about their relative in the intensive care unit in the hospital. The diagnosis is not good. The condition of the patient gets worse with each passing hour. The doctor walks into the room. You hold out hope. You want it so badly. But you know. You know things do not always work out like you hoped they would. With an answer that went against His very real desires, the Teacher looked to His pupils for support. But they were asleep.

When Peter Went To Sleep In Class, We See His Teacher Was Humbled

"Nevertheless." It is perhaps the single most important word in this passage (Matt. 26:39). It is the word that indicated the Teacher's heart. It is the word that shows submission. It is the word that reveals His priority. The Teacher knew the line that could not be crossed. He was very comfortable emptying His heart before the Father. In John 6:38, the Teacher had stated, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

Humility. It is not My will but yours that must be done. The Teacher was flat on His face. The Teacher was begging the Father for a way out. Yet, before He got off the ground He is telling the Father what He is going to do. Respect at its highest level is when you submit to an authority, even when their will is different than yours. The lesson the Teacher here teaches His pupils is so needed in this world. It is difficult for us to let go of "what

we want." Judges 21:25 speaks of a time when, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." The Teacher speaks in Matthew 15:9 of those who worship in vain, "teaching as doctrine the commandments of men." We all need to "wake up" and see the value of submission to the will of the Father. I honestly cannot think of any issue that cannot be traced to a respect for the authority of God, His Word and His will. How does one so sorrowful, so distressed, and so hopeful for another way find this strength of conviction?

When Peter Went To Sleep In Class, We See His Teacher Was Helpful

This one amazes me. We have already documented what the Teacher was enduring. We have seen His heart. We have heard His words. We have watched His actions. You are really not prepared for what happens next. He makes His way to the sleeping pupils. After acknowledging His hurt that they could not watch with Him, He turns His attention to their well-being. "Watch and pray" (Matt. 26:38). I do not want you to give in to temptation. While it is amazing, it is not surprising.

From the age of twelve when He revealed He must "be about My Father's business" (Luke 2:49) to the cross when He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34), the Teacher looked to help His pupils.

While we were sinners, Christ died for us. Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. His yesterdays and His tomorrows said this is what He would do. And He did it. With sleep still in the pupil's eyes, he said, "Watch and pray" (Matt. 26:38). Be on guard. They had no idea what they were facing, but He did. For the pupils who slept, the Teacher prayed in John 17, "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one... Sanctify them by Your truth" (John 17:15; John 17:17a).

When Peter Went to Sleep In Class, We See His Teacher Was Hated

The words basically function as an alarm clock. The words indicate to the pupils that it is time to leave this garden. The words serve to "wake up" the sleeping pupils and let them

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Deuteronomy 5:32

Wade Webster, Editor

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know action is at hand. "Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand" (Matt. 26:46).

Betrayer! The people approaching the entrance to the garden where the betrayer knew He would be hated Him. They were not going to be satisfied until the Teacher was destroyed. One of His own lead the mob. Even the pupils who had slept in the garden would "turn on Him." Our primary pupil whom we have discussed denied he even knew Him. The Teacher faced hatred from the very pupils He came to teach, serve, and save. He had said, "He that is not with me is against Me" (Matt. 12:30). He knew every one must choose his side and most would not choose Him. He knew the pupils who followed Him looked to Him as the "chief cornerstone" while those who rejected Him look to Him as "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense" (1 Pet. 2:7-8)

It is worth noting that the decision to do "the will of the Father" meant He was making a sacrifice even for those who hated Him. We all need to realize the sacrifice He willingly made for us.

Conclusion

In the garden, the Teacher clearly indicated to His pupils, "I need you now." He was distressed and sorrowful, battling the will of the Father with His own wants. Unfortunately, they were not there for Him. They went to sleep and left the Teacher discouraged and on His own. In Acts 1, these same pupils were standing by as the Teacher ascended into the clouds to sit at the right hand of the Father. His words to them then were the same as they were in the garden: "I need you now."

Thankfully, these pupils took His words to heart, woke up, and did what He commissioned them to do. The reality is, He looks to us all today, in 2009, with the same request, "I need you now." How will we respond? Will we act on His need or will we be found asleep?

Works Cited

1. Holy Bible: New King James Version.

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