

W@W161

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Read Mark 13:32-34 *"No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. 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. (NIV)*

Jesus sums up His teaching about the need to be prepared for God's future timetable including persecutions and the judgement to come. As with every undefined event, the temptation is to ignore it ... until it is so close that you can see it. But Jesus said that would be too late. Even He accepted the human limitation of not knowing; so the timetable could not be prized out of Him. The command was, once again, to be on guard (against their own weak inclinations and the false claims of those who would be anti-Christ (even inside the church). The challenge was always to be ready.

In verse 34, the 'servants' are the disciples of Christ. They not only have to fulfil their roles, but they also have the responsibility to watch out, like Nehemiah's men ([Nehemiah 4:17-18](#)). The watchman role was well understood from [Ezekiel 33:1-9](#) (it is interesting and important - do click the link), and Jesus applied it to these early disciples. They would to be left 'in charge of the shop'; not to indulge themselves, as in the parable of the selfish tenant farmers ([Mark 12:1-12](#)), but to ensure that the harvest would be ready for the Master's return.

In our age of materialism (despite the credit crunch), our attention is easily focussed on what we have now - and how we may gain more tomorrow. It is the wrong obsession! The defining moment for humanity is the return of the Master. All those who are wise will set their hearts on ensuring that He is satisfied when He arrives unannounced (except for these prophecies!).

Prayer: *Dear Lord. I know, in my head, that You will return and expect that I will have completed the task you have given to me. But I often forget how close that day may be; and I am too easily distracted by the things that will be worthless compared to pleasing You. So please help me to get my priorities sorted ... starting today!*

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Read Mark 13:35-37 *"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 cock 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!' "* (NIV)

Calculating the date of the return of Christ may be theologically intriguing, but it is practically irrelevant. If nobody was to be told and Jesus Himself did not know, why has there been a succession of 'end of the world' frenzies? The greatest religious delusion (apart from assuming to be God) is the desire to be in control of the future. It is not only occultists who specialise in prediction; religionists of all flavours do this as well.

Against this background, the words of Jesus remain relevant. Watching for His return is not intended to be a predictive exercise, or even an intensive comparison of Bible verses to arrive at a date. It is simple - it is a confident expectation that He will return and that the event could happen today! The 'watching' is therefore to be accompanied by getting on with the daily business of serving the interests of the Master's business (cf. [Luke 19:13](#)). A good test of our state of readiness is to ask, "If I knew that Jesus will come back tomorrow, what will I do today?" If the answer is anything different than you have already decided to do, you are neither ready nor watching!

The times when we are least awake, are the times of greatest vulnerability. Sleeping on the job is not good business practice. Yet many believers go for weeks or even months without any thought that Christ may come today - and live as though He will not! So, Jesus' words to everyone, "Watch!" applies to us as well.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Help me to live today (and every day) as though it may be my last before Jesus returns. May Your Kingdom set my agenda and Your Word guide my behaviour - so that You are glorified in my life and leave me without shame when you come for me. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:1-2 *Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. "But not during the Feast," they said, "or the people may riot." (NIV)*

This episode takes place on the Wednesday of Holy Week. The cross is just two days away, and the religious conspirators still have no plan. Like all worldlings, they are people-pleasers ... more concerned with how others will respond to them than with what is true. They have even admitted between themselves that the arrest and death of Jesus will have to be a sly trick.

It is assumed that religious authorities have right on their side, and that integrity is their hallmark. Alas, history has not shown that to be true, especially when the real Jesus gets in the way of political ambitions. A tell-tale sign of fleshly scheming is trying to appease the popular vote. Small church congregational government and large church synods are equally at risk; and even more so when spiritual sounding arguments become part of the justification for decision-making. "Not during the feast", showed no deference to the Lord - it was not about the dignity of worship, but rather the risk to their power if the Romans had to control a riot they had started.

This is a reminder of the need for integrity, without fudges or scheming. It is also a reminder of our responsibility to pray for church leaders and officials ... that their decisions may be truly in the Spirit and not in the flesh ... and that the real Jesus will be worshipped for who He truly is.

Prayer: *Father God. In these days when popular opinion vies with Your Word, help me to pray for those in religious authority that they may decide in accordance with Your Word and honour Jesus despite whatever the world may say. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:3-5 *While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly. (NIV)*

In 24 hours Jesus would be having His Last Supper; but this night was spent relaxing with friends in the home of a healed leper. What composure, in the face of agony to come! It was not unusual at a special dinner for honoured guests to be anointed with fragrant spices by the host: but at some point, it was Mary (sister of Martha and Lazarus) who came in and spilled out all her precious ointment in an act of extravagant devotion.

Showing devotion to Jesus is unlikely to win any prizes with those who do not. Today, more Christians are suffering because they love Jesus than at any time in history. Derision, harsh words, arrest, torture and execution are all on the same spectrum of abuse against Jesus. And He has personally experienced them all. That is why [Hebrews 12:3](#) says, "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (NIV) Mary experienced just a little sample of opposition from those at the dinner party. They were more interested in the buying power of the ointment (dressed up in terms of welfare for the poor): but don't forget that Judas was the treasurer!

Ridiculing genuine devotion to Jesus, is a Judas-like jealousy. It still causes pain in families, the workplace, schools and colleges. When the sacrifice of time, energy or money is more than the cynical consider as 'reasonable' - the knives are out. And in some countries and cultures, even today, the knives are made of sharp steel. But if you love Jesus, as Mary did, it is not everybody else's response that matters - only Jesus!

Prayer: *Dear Lord Jesus. Thank you so much for what you have done for me, because You love me. Help me to grow in my devotion to you, despite whatever derision may come my way. Where I have experienced that opposition, just because I love You, help me to be strong like You and not to lose heart. For your Name's sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:6-9 *"Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." (NIV)*

When Mary was being harassed by jealous religious materialists, it was Jesus who had the last word! What a relief it must have been to her. His explanation also provided her with a previously unknown reason for the spontaneous outpouring of love. Jesus described the action as beautiful and very timely. Never again would she be able to express her adoration in this way. As Jesus explained, her action had anticipated His burial, and was warmly received that night.

Although there are no prizes from the world if you love Jesus; He does give His reward. Here, He also promises that Gospel proclamation needs to include this story of faith and love and hope. It also tells of the importance in seizing the moment in telling out how great our love is. If that is important in human relationships, how much more with Jesus! Acts of devotion involve all of us, our thought, words and deeds. The apparently unnecessary acts of service or gifts may well be the opportunity of a lifetime to serve Jesus in a special and timely way.

Biographies of devoted Christians are always inspirational (some are written for children and inspire the next generation too), and this story is one of them. It should encourage us never to delay our gift of service to Jesus, and never be deterred by what the sceptics say about us. Perhaps you have been prompted to express your love for Jesus in a particular way - if so, don't delay!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus. I do love You. Please enable me to express my devotion to You in ways that will demonstrate the Gospel for Your glory's sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:10-11 *Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over. (NIV)*

Yesterdays' passage of extravagant devotion, and today's, of extravagant greed, are intentionally linked by the word 'then'. The contrast is so stark: one who loved Jesus so much that she gave him the best; and the other loved himself so much that he got the best he could out of Jesus. The worship of self must inevitably exclude the worship of Jesus, although we can cleverly disguise our self-centeredness in a nice looking religious way. But here, the real crime of self-worship is seen in all its awfulness - at heart it is not just the desire to sideline Jesus, but to get rid of Him. At last, the chief priests had found an ally on the inside: a man close to Jesus who shared their evil motive of bitter and envious self-love.

It was not just greed and the habit of theft that spurred Judas; perhaps it was also the purity of Mary's devotion to Jesus that excited the demonic hatred in Judas. His self-love had no space at all for the Lord, and he would have been intensely irritated by such an open display of devotion to the one he despised. Now all he needed to do was to seize the moment, and the money would be his ... as would the historical ignominy and the eternal remorse!

But remember Mary: she too, seized the moment. She chose to pour out her love, and Jesus publicly commended her. The readers are intended to put themselves into the picture and line up with one or other of the characters. Where is my love? for myself, or for Jesus? The two scenarios are mutually exclusive. Jesus said, "*Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*" ([Matt 6:21](#)). Mary and Judas both demonstrated what was precious to them, and thus revealed the natural location of their hearts, which marked the destiny of their souls.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus. Please show me where my love is directed, because I know that self-love can be so blind. Help me to turn my heart fully towards You so that my acts of devotion will be real and not fake. For Your Name's sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:12 *On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" (NIV)*

Special meals are still a way in which we mark the beginning of new relationships (like weddings) or celebrate anniversaries (like birthdays). The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a week long holiday (our word derives from holy-day) to celebrate God's provision for the Israelites as they fled from Egypt through the Red Sea - eating only the specially prepared unleavened bread (a dense bread made without yeast that would not 'go off' on the hot journey). That feast was preceded by the one-day Feast of Passover, which celebrated the night when the angel of death killed the firstborn in every household in Egypt, but 'passed over' the houses marked by the blood of a sacrificed lamb. Those who did not sacrifice the lamb experienced God's judgement, while those who did were saved. Read the whole story in [Exodus 12:1-42!](#)

The timing of this passage, on the Thursday of (what we now call) Holy Week was not coincidental. The Passover meal was not just to be a remembrance, but a prophetic pre-enactment of the death of Christ - the ultimate Passover Lamb. The disciples rightly assumed, despite all the plotting against Jesus that He would want to celebrate the feast. [Luke 22:14-15](#) shows His great eagerness. But what the disciples thought was a tradition to remember 1500 years previously, was really to prepare them for its prophetic fulfilment the following day - salvation day for all who will believe!

Today, when spiritual belief seems to be resurging, it is interesting to find such little certainty about who God is or how to become acceptable to Him. So it is a great relief to know that Jesus is not just our model for behaviour and ethics, but our sacrifice for sin. And to know that we please God by choosing the Lamb of God as our sacrifice - so that God's wrath will pass over us. When doubts come, it is the cross alone that provides objective evidence of God's mercy to sinners. We need that reassurance and our friends need to know why it is that we (and they) can be so sure!

Prayer: *Father God. Thank You for providing Jesus as my Passover Lamb, so that I can be confident of Your acceptance despite all my sin. Help me to grow in that confidence each day and not be afraid to speak of Jesus as my personal Saviour so that my friends and colleagues also may find salvation through trusting in His shed blood. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:13-16 *So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. (NIV)*

Jesus had reserved a suitable room for the Passover meal (Last Supper). He had already made the arrangements with the necessary security built in. All the details of this covert operation for two unnamed disciples had been worked out: the silent street encounter with the water carrier leading to the rendezvous; the password and the final instructions. All they had to do was to do as they were told.

As always, when Jesus reveals a plan which includes us, He tells us enough so that we know we are on track at each stage. Of course, all this was to set the stage for Jesus to fill - as the host at the meal and the teacher He would share His last words. But for the disciples, it was something for them to do. They could not foresee the consequences of their obedient actions, but Jesus did. What mattered was that they were entrusted with their part and that Jesus, who started the project, would complete it to his satisfaction.

We too cannot see the future, and we are not expected to second guess our Master's intentions. All we know is that He knows what He is doing, and that He asks us to play some small part - however strange the role may seem to be. Obedience in such circumstances is a privileged responsibility (note that only two of the disciples were trusted in this story). And it is not about how the disciples would make a name for themselves, but about how the Master would be able to use their obedience. Is there something you know Jesus asks of you, but you cannot see where it is going or how it will work out? Start by taking the first step!

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You that You know the future, that everyday is shaped by Your big plan. Help me to be willing to be obedient to play whatever small part You have allocated to me, so that what you have planned will glorify You. In Christ's Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:17-19 *When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me - one who is eating with me." They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely not I?" (NIV)*

The Passover Supper was ready. The two disciples in the advance guard had completed their preparations and Jesus now comes in with the other ten men. The habit of reclining on mats around a low table led to informality and relaxation despite the formal rehearsal of the usual words recalling the first Passover. But the atmosphere was shocked by Jesus' prediction that one of the twelve would betray Him.

Their shaken-ness was understandable. They had all spent the past two and a half years with Him. Usually, most of every day was spent in His company. Yes, they had their difficult moments and disagreements, but surely they were all 'on side'. They had no clue that the traitor in their midst was the trusted treasurer. But Jesus' statement left them grieved in their hearts. Each knew something of their own tendency to go astray or to question or even to criticise Jesus. Each felt that the finger of Jesus was pointing at them. Such is the power of a guilty conscience.

Like us, each of them had the potential to deny or be disloyal to Jesus. If we had been there, would we have had any less of a conscience - knowing that Jesus had seen right through us. Indeed the desire to get rid of the voice of God, and to do what suits us better, is the essential mark of sin that is on each person. And it was for that sin that Jesus was to die.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You for this reminder of my sinful nature and my potential to deny or defy You. Help me to learn to walk with you without hiding anything from You - so that I will glorify You and not betray You. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:20-21 *"It is one of the Twelve," he replied, "one who dips bread into the bowl with me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."* (NIV)

Jesus now identifies the betrayer. [John 13:26-27](#) says that Jesus gave a token of honour (a piece of bread soaked in the herb juices) to Judas, but he may well have done similarly to the others too. Clearly they did not see the action as special to Judas. And so the suspense continues even after Judas leaves the table. Two scenarios are about to be acted out, and Jesus explains what is about to happen.

On the one hand, the death of Jesus was a Divinely formulated plan, prophesied in Scripture, which Jesus relentlessly pursued to the point at which he could say, *"The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. No-one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."* ([John 10:17-18](#) (NIV)). On the other hand it was a human conspiracy of envy, hatred and greed that found its expression through Judas' betrayal. But the Divine plan in no way excused the betrayer, whose eternal fate would be the consequence of his own actions.

Here the covenant grace of God and the choices of human free will find a remarkable alliance. In no way does the action of man cut across God's will, and in no way does God force Judas into actions that he had not chosen. However nice it might be to seek to reconcile grace and free will, it is God's privilege to do so and not ours. We can neither excuse our behaviour on the grounds that 'God left me no choice'; nor reduce the impact of His sovereign will by claiming any credit for our initiatives. The fact is that God always does what He chooses, and we are left with the responsibility to choose in line with His revealed will. Those who do that (like Mary in [Mark 14:6-9](#)) are commended: those who do not, like Judas, are condemned. The choice is yours!

Prayer: *Sovereign Lord. You always do what is right to achieve Your purposes. Help me to understand Your will from the Scripture, so that I will know which choices will please you; and then help me to do what I know to be right - so that I may receive Your blessing. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:22-26 *While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God." When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. (NIV)*

With the shadow of betrayal hanging over all of them, Jesus departed from the usual Passover words as He broke the bread. Instead of looking back 1500 years He pointed to the following day - when His body would be broken, and blood poured out. The familiarity of our communion service needs to take a step back as we re-hear the stunning words from Jesus: this broken bread ... His body: this poured out wine ... His blood. This was clearly to be a terminus for Him - the annual ritual of Passover was now over for Jesus, but He pointed to a greater future ahead.

In the same way that Old Testament covenants were marked with a meal, a new covenant is now set up at this supper. It was to be sealed by His blood. The covenant was, however, not just for the enjoyment of the twelve, but for 'many'. They were privileged to see its inauguration; but we are privileged (along with them and many others) to believe it is for us and to wait for its fulfilment. In the same way that the first Passover was fulfilled in the death of Christ, this last Supper will be fulfilled when He comes again.

It needs a little discipline to see past the familiar form of the communion service we are used to. It is not intended to be just a nice spiritual comfort blanket, but a potent and shocking reminder of what Jesus did for us on the cross. Although the work of the cross is complete in itself, its consequences, the huge Kingdom of grateful believers, is yet to be seen. And He intends that we should look forward to that day as much as He does.

Prayer: *Father God. Keep me looking forward to that great day when the Kingdom is complete and Jesus takes His place as King. Thank you that beyond my sin and His cross; lies an eternity of love, joy and peace into which His blood has bound me, along with many others. Help me to live and speak of Christ so that my family and friends may be part of that great kingdom. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:27-28 "You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written: " 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." (NIV)

From, "one of you will betray me" to "you will all fall away": it seems that Jesus is not letting them off the hook! They are all in the same boat; they are all more interested in their own skins than that of Jesus. We know that in the end, they all left Him and Peter spectacularly denied that he even knew Jesus. Again, their falling away (or more accurately, 'being scandalised by Jesus') was their own free will reaction: but the prophecy of Scripture from [Zechariah 13:7](#) foretold what would happen. And it did!

However, as they are walking out into the darkness of the Mount of Olives, Jesus does not let the moment pass without offering real hope. He clearly contrasts their weakest moment to come, with His strongest. "But after I have risen ...", is Jesus' promise to keep on leading, going ahead of them so that he would be ready to greet and welcome them. Interestingly, that experience would also be a physically worked out example of the great resurrection of the church on the last day, when Jesus will come to claim His Bride. It was great training for the embryo leaders of the early church, who often encouraged the Christians to keep looking ahead to Jesus, whatever the circumstances.

Whatever may have been in our past, the Lord Jesus is still ahead of us. Unlike the heroes of the world religions, Jesus is not just a revered figure of yesterday; He has gone on ahead of us to prepare a place for us and to welcome us on the final day (cf [John 14:1-6](#)). That is the hope of every believer, and without that we can only descend into the squalor of a troubled world to cope as best we can. The old hymn says, "Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, blessing all mine and ten thousand beside!" It is right. Even though you may have fallen away, Jesus is still ahead of you, and you can still come back to Him. It's worth telling your friend that, too!

Prayer: *Gracious God. Thank You that in Christ I have a confidence about the future, whatever the circumstances. Despite my failure, Your grace is amazing; and I ask for Your help to keep me always looking ahead to Jesus, and sharing my confidence with others. In His Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:29-31 *Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not." "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "today - yes, tonight - before the cock crows twice you yourself will disown me three times." But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same. (NIV)*

Denying the Word of God is the essence of sin. Here, Peter spectacularly proves the point. Not only does he contradict Jesus, he also boasts of his own ability to stay true. Jesus rebukes him by accurately predicting the exact timing of his failure the next morning. But, as if to show us how self-centred and blind the sinful nature is, Mark then records Peter's emphatic denial of the rebuke he had received. It must have been quite a moment for Mark to hear (who got his information from Peter in his later years), when the head-bowed bishop of the early church confessed his crass arrogance just hours before his catastrophic spiritual breakdown.

There are few more 'celebrated' Christian failures. But, in fairness to Peter he was not alone, as all the others agreed with him. Alas, the self-propelled agenda of the proud heart, that believes it can achieve anything it chooses, is all too much in evidence today. The professions of loyalty that melt into indifference, and the bold hand of faith that eventually shrinks for the task - these are also still seen as wrecks along the Christian road. The fact remains, that apart from the grace and power of God we can do nothing (cf [John 15:5](#)).

Strangely, our best intentions may produce our worst moments - if we are not in line with the will of God, and empowered by his Holy Spirit. It remains a grotesque arrogance to pretend that there is no remnant of our sinful nature, or that somehow we can do the work of God without His mandate or strength. Yet swarms of well meaning Christian groups and churches are better equipped with information technology than prayer; and fleshly passion than holy submission. Peter's mistake can be ours, and very easily too! So perhaps this passage should be a reality check.

Prayer: *Father God. Thank You for all the blessings I have received and gifts to enable me to serve You. Forgive me when I either believe that I am useless, or that Your Kingdom somehow depends on my bright ideas and energy. Help me to daily subdue the old nature and let the life of Christ grow in me. For His Name's sake. Amen.*

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

Watching and praying are the two least favourite activities for most Christians. They are replaced by doing and talking, all too often! Yet Jesus knew differently. His prayer that night was not a sudden reaction to an unexpected crisis: it was a part of His normal lifestyle (cf [Hebrews 5:7](#)) - don't forget that the cross was in his sights all along, and undoubtedly occupied much of His prayer time in the early mornings (cf [Mark 1:35](#)).

But the crucial moment was almost upon Him. The most important thing He could do was to share all His deepest thoughts and emotions with His Father - and to let the three disciples see the agony of a man facing death with the full load of the world's sin upon Him. No death they might face could ever be so gross. Contrary to some British thinking, it is not wrong to have profound emotions, nor wrong to express them: neither is it wrong to value human company. Jesus was a real man and needed both His heavenly Father and His earthly fellowship. None of us is designed to work in any other way.

Inactivity, except watchfulness and prayer, requires the inner confidence that there is nothing more that can or should be done. When Jesus excludes all other options, that quiet alertness is a mark of faith (and agitated activity is a mark of disbelief). The Saviour always knows what He is doing, and prepares us in the best way for every tomorrow.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father. Please forgive my anxious thoughts and frenetic activity when there is nothing to do except to await Your time. Please prompt me to action and to stillness at the appropriate time, and help me to know the difference between the two. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:35-36 *Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."* (NIV)

Jesus knew, full well, what the agreed plan was - to die on a cross, bearing the sins of the world and experiencing the full weight of the Father's wrath against Himself. That 'cup of God's wrath' had already been explained in the Old Testament (cf. [Is 51:17](#)), and mentioned by Jesus in [Mark 10:38-39](#).

But as a man, that did not stop Him pleading with His Father that He might be spared the agony of the cross. Jesus was confident that the power and authority could be safely left in the Father's hands. Father God can always do whatever He pleases; and it was in His hand to grant or refuse the request. But Jesus was no victim of cosmic child abuse (as some have claimed), He willingly chose to submit Himself to His Father's will; and He also did that because He loved us!

Of course this Gethsemane experience was unique. It was not intended to be a model for those going through hard times. Even in our darkest moments, no Christian will ever have to bear the weight of His own sins and face the wrath of God ... Jesus has already done that for us. But one principle still applies, "Yet not what I will, but what You will"! Our suffering has no atoning power, but it is suffering none the less. Can we trust the Lord in our little pain, as Jesus could in His awesome passion? Above all, do we really trust that all He suffered was because of us: so that whatever life throws at us, eternity will be calm and bright?

Prayer: *Father God. How I thank You that Jesus has already suffered for all my sins; and that He did so because He loved me. In my little world at home and at work, help me to show my gratitude by seeking Your will above my own. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:37-38 *Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."* (NIV)

After Peter's declaration in the Upper Room (cf [Mark 14:29](#)) of unswerving loyalty, sleeping on duty was not a good start! But the sleep of weariness or despair is never invigorating; it is just an anaesthetic for the hopeless heart. Every spiritual failure starts when we stop watching the Lord, which was the error of these men, despite Jesus' human plea and Master's command.

It may be true that Peter had little idea of the significance of the moment, but that is just why he should have been watching. Instead, he and the others came to their own view as to the pointlessness of watching - and let sleep take over. Their disobedience was going to make them vulnerable to one temptation after another. Watchfulness and prayer go together. Although intercessory prayer is a spiritual activity, it requires the cooperation of an alert body and mind. But, the body that contains our fleshly nature is remarkably reluctant to keep looking to Jesus or to pray. Such reluctance is our great spiritual weakness and needs to be fought against, with all the energy of the exhausted marathon runner - longing to stop but convinced that there is no winning without completing the course.

Prayerlessness is probably the Christian's number one weak point. From there, every temptation can be seen through rose coloured spectacles, and every command becomes a matter of personal preference. Let's acknowledge our personal failure, and get back to watching Jesus, as we meditate on the Scriptures! Start date: today!

Prayer: *Heavenly Father. I confess my prayerlessness that stems from failing to see who Jesus is afresh each day. Help me to make prayer more of a priority than work or play, and then I will be able to do both to Your glory. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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

The rebuke of Jesus to His sleepy disciples (cf [Mark 14:37-38](#)) should have been enough to jolt them into apology, and a determination to stay awake. Far from it! As Jesus returned to pray, the trusted men returned to sleep. The Master's task was unchanged and the disciples remained unmoved. They were on different tracks. In Bible language, "They did not know what to say", meant that they knew that they had no excuse, Jesus was right and they were in the wrong. But Satan's lies had already been swallowed and they were paralysed. They could not change their pattern of behaviour.

The reason for sleep is stated very simply, "... their eyes were heavy". Their spiritually motivated will had given up, and the flesh took over, leaving them open to temptation just as Jesus had predicted. The first temptation was to ignore Jesus' command to watch him (it parallels Satan first temptation in [Genesis 3:1](#) to doubt the authority of God's Word), and to assume that it did not matter. But Jesus would only have asked them to watch while He prayed if it did matter! So, for a second time the disciples chose to make up their own mind on whether the Divine Word mattered. Their conclusion was 'No'. They were so wrong!

Repeated reinterpretation of Scripture to suit personal circumstances (which is really serial disobedience) is exceptionally dangerous. Not only does it label the offender as having wilful arrogance, it frustrates the purposes of God: but worse, it opens up a motorway for truckloads of demonic temptations. Let's not even think of going there. 'Trust and obey', the old hymn says - so lets do it!

Prayer: *Father God. Please forgive my attempts at reinterpreting Your Word to suit my own convenience. Help me to take what You say at face value, and do it, so that Satan will not have an easy foothold to launch more attacks. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:41-42 *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 betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" (NIV)*

There comes a time, when God will move on, whether or not His people are ready. Jesus had concluded His three sessions of prayer to prepare Him to win through to the final victory: and the disciples had finished their three sessions of sleep, leaving them wide open for spiritual defeat. There was no more time for infinite repeat chances to choose to obey. The dreadful hour of betrayal had come. We may point the finger at Judas, lurking in the bushes, but what about the disciples? They would all let down their Master.

Jesus is prepared for the ordeal to come, but His men were (literally) all over the place. They would run away, and Peter was to dishonour his treasured relationship by a series of spectacular denials. It seems that Jesus was eager to get on with the task ahead ("Rise! Let us go!"). Indeed He knew that the summit of His work was approaching and he had no doubt that He was made for this very hour (cf [John 12:27](#)).

Spiritual preparation is essential before every spiritual battle. But the casualness that dresses many believers today is in stark contrast to the earnestness of Jesus in Gethsemane - it is much more like the apathetic attitude of His three key disciples. Who are we most like? If we have lost our vigour for obedience, watchfulness and prayer, we will also loose the next set of spiritual battles!

Prayer: *Father God. Thank You for Your great patience with me, but please help me to be properly alert to Your Word and willing to put my best effort into doing what you say. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:43-45 *Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. (NIV)*

What a sad and sick scene! Jesus, prepared to die for the sins of the world, was confronted by pompous religious leaders and a mob. A pathetically unprepared group of disciples stood there limply in the darkness, while their treasurer (Judas Iscariot) feigns a loyal greeting. As the kiss is planted the trap is sprung. Love has been betrayed, religious authority is unmasked, law has been violated ... everything true has been turned on its head. Death is now in the air.

But none of this was a surprise to Jesus (cf [Mark 14:42](#) 'Let us go. Here comes my betrayer'), because He was prepared. The Gethsemane prayer battle would ensure Jesus' endurance through the ordeal, until the final victory came. Everybody else would be guilty of Divine treason, the willing or careless accomplices of the Satanic strategy.

This event is unique: there is no modern parallel. But it does show the sordidness of religion without truth, and signs of fellowship without its reality: both are demonic trademarks. Also, this grubby start to Christ's passion has all the fingerprints of the sin in human beings. Much as we may criticise the villains of this drama, Jesus died for them ... and for us too! You see, our salvation was not won by some clinical execution, but by the cruel pain surrounded by lies and false love - that so easily take root in all our hearts. That is why we should be both grateful to Jesus, and also careful that we do not grieve Him by offending in the same way again.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. I am so grateful that You endured the lies as well as the lashes for me. The falsehood and rebellion that nailed You to the cross was mine as well as theirs. Please teach me to live the new life you have won for me, and not to grieve You today. For Your Name's sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:46-47 *The men seized Jesus and arrested him. Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. (NIV)*

We may well feel really sad about the way that the Son of God was manhandled in His arrest, as though He would escape their puny clutches. But He did not resist - this was completely in line with God's plan. He went 'as a lamb to the slaughter' (cf [Is. 53:7](#)). By contrast, the self-sufficient Peter, who had boasted of his loyalty probably swung his sword at the High Priest, missed and instead just cut off his servant's ear.

Had Peter been alert in Gethsemane, and had he prepared himself in prayer, such a stupid act would have been out of the question. Apart from anything else, it was a hanging offence ... there might have been four crosses instead of three. Whatever Peter's motivation, he had not understood that Jesus had to die for the sins of everybody, including Peter. The big error of understanding was that Peter could never be Jesus' saviour: Jesus was to be Peter's Saviour.

Although we usually err in being too passive and non-confrontational, there are times when it is our responsibility to protect the business, the family, our colleagues or even the church. Yes, we may have a responsibility to protect, guard and nurture: it may be our job to make wise decisions to ensure the stability of the business. But when it comes to taking the place of Jesus in being the Saviour - we cannot and must not assume that responsibility. He alone is the Saviour.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank you for being my Saviour and the only Saviour for the world. Forgive me when I prayerlessly presume to be the answer to the world's needs, when it is You I should be advertising. In Your Name. Amen.*

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