

Get Up

Matthew 26:36-46

Dr. Pierre Cannings

I. Stay Awake vs. 36-41

- a. Peter and the Two Sons of Zebedee
 - i. Matthew identifies James and John not by their names, as in Mk. 14:33, but as ‘the two sons of Zebedee’.
 - ii. This will allow Peter to be the only named disciple in the episode, but given other links between 26:36–46 and 20:20–28 the change will also serve to enhance the links. Peter is there as the one who will deny Jesus; is it too much to suggest that the sons of Zebedee are there as precisely those who have asked, via their mother, for positions at Jesus’ right and left hand
 - iii. The specifying ‘to his disciples’ (cf. v. 45 diff. Mk 14:41) is Matthean, the rest from Mk 14:37. We again quote Pascal: ‘Jesus seeks some comfort at least from his three dearest friends, and they sleep: he asks them to bear with him a while, and they abandon him with complete indifference, and with so little pity that it did not keep them awake even for a single moment. And so Jesus was abandoned
 - iv. This is one of the special occasions in which only the inner core of disciples is allowed to participate (cf. earlier 17:1 [the transfiguration; for parallels with the present pericope, see Kenny]; Mark 5:37 [raising of a dead girl]). At this hour of trial, it is only natural that Jesus would want the emotional support of his closest friends (see Barbour for a discussion of Jesus’ testing in the face of evil). The two sons of Zebedee are of course James and John (cf. 4:21; 10:2; Mark 14:33). The reason for Jesus’ desire to pray is indicated in the infinitives λυπεῖσθαι and ἀδημονεῖν, namely, that he was “sorrowful” and “anxious
- b. Keep Watch
 - i. Keep Watch- **to stay awake, be watchful** to remain awake because of the need to continue alert
 1. Stay here’ runs parallel to the ‘sit here’ of Mt. 26:36, just as ‘went ahead’ in v. 39 has a parallel role to ‘go off’ in v. 36. Jesus’ need for privacy with God marks this as a critical time. But the three who have accompanied Jesus further are asked to watch with him. While ‘with me’ expresses solidarity with Jesus, it is not at once so clear what kind of watching is in view

2. Accordingly, the command to “watch” (γρηγορεῖν) becomes a standard feature in ethical catechism in the NT (in the sense of spiritual preparedness; cf. 1 Cor 16:13; Col 4:2; 1 Thess 5:6; 1 Peter 5:8; see Lövestam, as does the command to pray (cf. Eph 6:18; 1 Thess 5:17; 1 Peter 4:7). The reference to praying so as not to enter testing recalls the petition of the model prayer in reference to the great eschatological trial (6:13). (The experience of Jesus’ own testing in the context of testing to be experienced by the disciples brings to mind Heb 2:18; 4:15).
 3. Many of the key words in 26:36–46 have eschatological associations. γρηγορεῖτε harks back to 24:42, 43, and 25:13, all verses about watching for the coming of the Son of man. In the commentary on 20:22–3 we urge that ποτήριον should be associated with eschatological judgement; and in 1, pp. 613–14, we argue that μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς πειρασμόν envisages eschatological trial. καθεύδοντας recalls 25:5, where the foolish virgins sleep and so miss the messianic banquet. ἤγγικεν (in first position) echoes 3:2; 4:17; and 10:7—all proclamations about the nearness of the kingdom. Finally, ἡ ὥρα has eschatological sense in 24:36, 44, 50; and 25:13. The confluence of these loaded terms strongly implies that in Matthew the passion of Jesus is eschatological: it belongs to or foreshadows the messianic woes.
- c. Found them sleep
- i. Said to Peter
 1. Though Matthew follows Mark in having Jesus’ words addressed to Peter, he marks what is said as not individual to Peter by changing Mark’s second person singular verb to the second person plural form. He repeats here the μετ’ ἐμοῦ (‘with me’) that was added in v. 38.
 - ii. Couldn’t keep watch
 1. For one Hour
 - a. Given the reference to come to the flesh being weak, the former is preferable. μίαν ὥραν (‘one hour’) here is consistent with a period of prayer of up to an hour. But although it is the basis for the traditional understanding of a three-hour vigil
 - b. but the disobedient disciples—who promised so much (vv. 33–5)—sleep and so add to the hurt done by enemies.
 - c. When Jesus returns to the three disciples, he finds that they are sleeping and that he has received no support from them. They seem oblivious to what he is going through despite the indication of his anguish in v. 38. καθεύδοντας, “sleeping,” here and in v. 43 is a culpable act (unlike in 25:5), especially after the command of v. 38

II. Snooze vs. 42-43

a. Praying - to petition deity

- i. As we saw earlier, the petition in the Lord's Prayer is to be spared times of great pressure, times which would prove very trying for one, and the prayer reflects a sense of one's own frailty and limitation, one's vulnerability to situations in which one finds oneself. The prayer the disciples are being asked to pray parallels broadly that which Jesus is praying for himself. They are to pray to be spared the pressure that it is becoming clear Jesus is not to be spared. In 20:21 the sons of Zebedee have asked for positions at Jesus' right and left hand; here they are in effect being told to pray to be spared

b. Enter into Temptation

- i. Temptation - within, that can be an occasion of sin to a person

ii. Spirit is willing

1. Spirit

2. Willing - **to being eager to be of service, ready, willing, eager**, of "The spirit indeed presses eagerly, but the flesh is powerless the spirit

- a. saying tells us that this can be trodden only in orientation and commitment, not on the basis of inner movement alone. Where the latter is attempted, there is disclosed the limitation of man which causes him to fail. Hence the saying is a bridge from the disciples' declaration of solidarity with Jesus (Mt. 26:35 and par.) to their failure on the way with Him, and it shows us why failure was inevitable

- b. If Jesus' experience in Gethsemane underlines the truth that τὸ μὲν πνεῦμα πρόθυμον, ἡ δὲ σὰρξ ἀσθενής, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak," how much more will this be the experience of the disciples in the struggles that await them. This logion points to the tension between the inner person, the center of volition, and the outer person, the bodily flesh with its more obvious inherent weakness (for the spirit flesh distinction, see 1 Cor 7:34; 2 Cor 7:1; cf. Rom 8:4-17; Gal 5:17,

iii. Flesh is Weak

1. Flesh

- a. In the OT 'spirit' and 'flesh' each represent the human person, but considered, at least sometimes and to some extent, under different aspects. 'Flesh' is the easier word to comment on. In Brown's words, "Flesh" applies to human beings ... in their tangible, perishable, and earthly aspects'.

b. In connection with 'flesh' the disciples are not distinctive: they too are weak and subject to temptation. Under pressure they too are likely to break. 'The spirit is willing' is, however, something that distinguishes the disciples from many others. They have been eager to identify themselves with Jesus and his project. They have recently declared their readiness to die for him. Their prayer must be to be spared a situation that could prove to be too much for them. But for them too, there sits in the background the need, ultimately, to submit their wills to the divine will.

2. Weak - **to experiencing some incapacity or limitation**

c. Again

i. Eyes were Heavy - of physical weariness

ii. Didn't wake them up

1. This interpretation is consonant with the fact that Matthew in the preceding verse gives no report of Jesus saying anything to the disciples. It is also in agreement with the command of v. 45 that they go on with their sleeping,

III. Overslept vs. 44-46

a. Still Sleeping

i. The same motivation may lie behind the omission of the expression of embarrassment in Mark, 'and they did not know what to say to him'. The additional urgency expressed by Jesus in v. 41 has made no difference. The disciples might need to pray because the flesh is weak, but the weakness of the flesh is already getting in the way of the needful prayer being undertaken.

b. The Hour is at hand

i. Son of Man being betrayed

ii. It seems best to refer λοιπόν to the third and last period of time available and for which Jesus has encouraged watching with him and praying, but which the disciples have instead used for sleeping and taking their rest. So I translate λοιπόν as 'for the time that was left' The available time for watching and praying versus sleeping and taking one's rest has passed.

c. Get Up