

STAY AWAKE! Read Mark 13

“Stay awake!” was the directive Jesus gave His disciples during the Passion Week. Jesus wanted them to be prepared for His unannounced return. Immediately preceding the directive to stay awake, Jesus had related the signs of His coming: wars and rumors of wars, the abomination of desolation, and the darkening of the sun (Mark 13:7, 14, and 24). Since they were not to know the “day or hour” of this event, Jesus commanded that they “Take heed!” and “**Stay awake!**” (13:33). In fact, the words “stay awake” are repeated five times in Mark 13:33-37 to emphasize their importance. The reader, however, may not be sure just what it means to “stay awake.”

Furthermore, Jesus explained that the disciples, like doorkeepers, were to “**stay awake**” by “the master of a house” who went “away on a journey” (Mk. 13:34). Because they did not know “when the master of the house is coming,” they were to “**stay awake**.” Thus, whenever he returned, even if he were to arrive “when the **rooster crows**,” the master would not find them “**asleep**” (vv. 35-36). Hence, Jesus’ final admonition was to “**stay awake!**” (v. 37).

Following these instructions, a test drive was arranged for the disciples. Before we buy a car, we take it out for a test drive to see if it will perform the way we hope. Jesus wanted to know if the disciples would perform the way He hoped. Would they be prepared for His imminent return? Would He find them “asleep” or “awake” if He arrived at the crowing of a rooster? Therefore, at Gethsemane, Jesus provided a test drive for his disciples.

The evening before the crucifixion, Jesus and His disciples entered a garden called Gethsemane for the purpose of prayer. After taking aside Peter, James, and John, Jesus explained that his soul was “deeply grieved to the point of death” (Mk. 14:34). Thus, He requested that they “**stay awake**” (v. 34). Instead, as Jesus was crying out “Abba! Father!” they fell asleep.

After Jesus “found them **sleeping**,” He asked Peter, “Simon, are you **asleep**? Could you not **stay awake** for one hour?” (Mk. 14:37). Then Jesus gave an explanation for the command to stay awake—it was to pray “that you may not come into temptation” (v. 38). Three times, however, Jesus “found them **sleeping**.” Thrice they had ignored the command to pray (v. 41). The disciples failed the test drive. They were not prepared for the temptation that would follow.

Later, when Jesus was arrested, Peter followed Jesus “at a distance” (Mark 14:54). The first time he succumbed to the temptation to deny Jesus, it was through “one of the servant-girls of the high priest” (v. 67). She merely accused Peter of being “with Jesus the Nazarene” (v. 67). After Peter’s denial, the servant-girl turned her attention to “the bystanders” saying, “This is one of them!” (v. 69). Finally, it is the bystanders who began to testify against him proclaiming, “Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean too” (v. 70). With a third denial, a “**rooster crowed**” reminding Peter that he was not prepared; he had not “**stayed awake**.”

The directive from Jesus to His disciples during the Passion Week was ignored. They did not “stay awake;” they did not pray. Three times Jesus prayed; three times Peter slept instead. Peter had been implored to pray with Jesus in order to resist temptation, yet he continued to sleep. Thus, thrice, Peter was unable to resist temptation. Therefore, the test

drive failed. He demonstrated that he would not be ready for the “return of the master” when the “**rooster crows**” (13:35).

The link between prayer and resisting temptation is obvious. Though Peter failed to make that link at Gethsemane, did he learn to stay awake? Did he find out how to resist temptation through prayer? Did he discover how to be ready for the master’s return? The answer to this question may lie in a letter Peter wrote to fellow believers long after the resurrection: “Be of sober spirit, **stay awake**. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Yes, he did!