

Keep Awake

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Preacher: Philip Wells

[0 : 00] Well let's come and look at this subject this evening of keeping awake. I'm copying what Steve Timis said in this book as I recommended it the other day. I wish Jesus hadn't said that but I'm really glad that he did. It's various chapters of things that to me are tough sayings and likewise to the writer but things that we probably need to hear because they are tough and I think this is a tough one. Keep awake or keep on watch. Let's pray. Lord do help us to have in our hearts that expectation and that hope and to live according to it and help us too to heed your words to keep awake and to keep on watch. So please bless this time. Help us Lord not to go to sleep. Help us not to waste the time but to learn from you and to heed what you have to say for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Well if you are feeling sleepy this is the only thing that you need to learn that Jesus says to us stay awake. Having said that you can now go to sleep if you see what I mean. Keep awake, keep on watch, keep watch. This expression is used at least 23 times in the New Testament and therefore it has an emphasis and an importance and I wonder why it's important. Let's think of some examples why it might be important to keep on watch or to keep awake. Driving a car is easy. Driving a car is easy. You might say to yourself I don't personally find driving a car easy but you might be thinking it's so easy I could do it in my sleep.

You might be thinking to yourself and I'm thinking actually that's one thing you can't do in your sleep, drive a car isn't it? In fact it's a very dangerous thing to fall asleep when you're driving a car and sometimes people do. I remember when we came back from the Carey Family Conference they used to have the late night fun concert on the Friday evening so you'd be up way past normal bedtime all excited and you couldn't get to sleep and then the following day you'd make this long journey and I remember with all the children asleep in the car and my wife asleep in the car and I'm driving down the motorway thinking oh I really think I'd like to go to sleep as well actually and it's a dangerous thing and it's a very tempting thing to go to sleep and that sort of situation. Nice full stomach, had a late night last night and I just like to go to sleep. But keeping awake is very important. There's an example.

Here's another example. So at home we've got one of these little coffee makers which is a little Italian contraption with a handle. What's it called? What's this called? Tim calls it a brickie.

You unscrew the top. What's it called? It's not a percolator. I don't think it's... Espresso maker. Yeah it's well the way it works is you put the water in the bottom.

[3 : 32] It's got a little receptacle for the coffee, the ground up coffee and then what it does is you set it to boil and it sends the water and the steam up through the coffee and it all collects in the top and it just takes a few minutes to do this. So I looked at the instructions on the internet and it said put in such and such amount of coffee. It's about that sort of size and it says put it on on a gentle heat so that the flames don't lick up around the side of it and make the handle hot and it says put it on a gentle heat and do not leave the room. It says do not leave the room.

What did I do? I put it on and I thought well this is taking a while. It's going to take ages this is. I will just go into the front room and have a quick look at I don't know what I was going to look at read the Argus or something like that.

You know what's going to happen next don't you? Because about 20 minutes later I went back into the kitchen found this dried up semi-melted coagulation of metal plastic coffee. I'm exaggerating but it was it said do not leave the room but I did and I've ever since I've remembered when it's even though it seems to be taking a long time don't take your eyes off it because it's important under situations like that to keep watching which is exactly what I failed to do do you see? And here's a third example.

So around the back of Stanley Road here I never sure how to spell graffiti is that right? Well that's the way I've spelled it anyway. There has been graffiti there's actually one or two people who are

doing a lot of graffiti in this area at the moment and you can recognize their style and their tagging and so on and the residents at Stanley Road are really annoyed about this and the so we had a little meeting about it and the PCSOs the police community sport officers says well it's very easy what you do is you have to stay awake till three o'clock to catch them because that's when they come around at three o'clock they jump on Mr Patel's garage and sprayed the side of his wall I don't know whether you've noticed that or they sprayed his garage and the only way to find them is to well you don't know when they're coming you've just got to stay awake all night to catch them in this unpredictable event you've just got to stay awake. Now nobody's going to volunteer to do that nobody's going to volunteer to do that but that's why you might think staying awake keeping your eyes open keeping on watch is important for things like ongoing tasks where you mustn't lose consciousness like driving a car or being ready for a final event when this when the coffee's finally made you've got to be there to turn it off before it all fries itself or an unpredictable event like the graffiti when you just don't know when it's going to happen you've got to keep awake. I think they're similar they're not exactly the same but the New Testament I think picks up on all those thoughts and more as well and says you've got to keep awake spiritually.

The verb that I'm looking at is Grigorevo I don't know which way you put the accent from which I presume comes the the name Gregory so Gregory if you're named Gregory I don't know if anybody here is named Gregory it means watcher person who stays awake Gregory if you had a baby called Gregory you probably think I wish I'd never given the child a name where it would go to sleep. It's apparently according to my computer it's from a year which means arise so it's sort of being up being up and about as distinct from being asleep being vigilant and alert as as distinct from being unconscious or just being awake and the New Testament those are the verbs that I read out keep watch is the Grigorevo word. The owner would have kept watch on the parable of the parable of the 10 virgins therefore keep watch.

[8 : 17] I think it's linked with the New Testament time scale the New Testament has a time scale the clock starts ticking with the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the clock is counting down to when the day arrives and one way of thinking of it is that that's when the dawn comes so we're looking forward to the dawn and at the moment the night is far spent the time is ticking away and we need to be ready for the dawn or you could put it another way it's not entirely different here we are that's the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ here is the the last day the coming and we need to be watching and ready for that day for that that that event that terminal event so this is the way that well this is what i'm thinking of this is where i'm introducing the subject which i hope makes sense let's look at some references and we'll talk about them and i would like to conclude with how can we keep awake so that's really all i want to do let's look at Matthew 24 which was what was read and there are certain things that hang together the way the gospels portray this matter of keeping awake one of the things that comes into the mix is the prayer in the garden of gethsemane where the people praying apart from jesus fall asleep and jesus says couldn't you stay awake couldn't you keep watch couldn't you watch and pray with me that's one of the ingredients that comes into it but i was looking i was thinking for this evening on this other ingredient which is as we have in Matthew 24 1 to 35 uh the coming of jesus and at the risk of oversimplifying it in Matthew 24 jesus is dealing with uh not just one event but events that you can see in one view but they're actually separated by a distance rather like a mountain peak that's near and a mountain peak that's further away as you look at them they seem next to each other there's actually a big distance between them and the first mountain peak i would suggest is the fall of jerusalem and in Matthew 24 jesus sees that cataclysmic event and says things like in verse 15 so when you see that in the holy place the abomination that causes desolation spoken of through the prophet daniel let the reader understand then let those who are in judea flee to the mountains because that that great judgment event is about to happen and then i would suggest that later on in the chapter he speaks not just about this near peak but the distant peak in verse 36 that day now about that day or hour no one knows that day or hour not even the angels of heaven nor the sun but only the father and he says you don't know when that final event will come but you need to be ready for it and so i i pause to comment that jesus has spoken of as he as he was there looking forward to a near event the fall of jerusalem

and a distant event the coming and the last day the fall of jerusalem happened it's a historical fact and i proposed to a new york that the fact that that history was fulfilled gives confidence that the other bit that he talked about will also happen it's not just a pie in the sky a rock with nothing to

sustain it a rock in the sky as it were but it's something that Jesus said I said that and that happened and I'm also saying this and you can depend that's going to happen as well his final coming and in verse 45 to 51 he puts it in these terms actually I should look at verse 42 to 44 in terms of a bit like the graffiti the thief who comes when you don't know so the unpredictable event you have to be ready for it at all times because you don't know exactly when it will happen so if the owner of the house verse 43 had known at what time the thief was coming he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into so you must be ready because the son of man will come at an hour when you do not expect him so he's saying there's no time that we can say well the Lord won't come in the next seven days so we can go off duty for seven days or something like that he says you just don't know you've got to be ready at all times and then verse 45 to 51 slightly different way of using this idea who then is the faithful and wise servant whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time it will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns I tell you the truth he will put him in charge of all his possessions but suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself my master staying away a long time and then he begins to beat his fellow servants and eat and drink with drunkards and he's certainly gone off doing what he was supposed to be doing and that's a very disproportionately savage ending to it so it would appear when the master turns up he will cut this servant this steward into pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth which seems pretty tough so that section is not about an unpredictable event but so much as current duties and attitudes the point I think being that those activities are valued by the master even in his absence and when he returns he will show how much he valued those things even when he was absent they're valued by the master even in his absence and thus valued by him at his return so the person doing the things the master told him or her to do he will say it's good for you I will put you in charge of all my possessions but the person who doesn't do it and they were valued activities but they haven't been done and the master will be extremely angry as we've just said so I think that one is about current duties and attitudes chapter 25 1 verse 1 to 13 is when you think about it it's a little bit different again so this is not current duties and attitudes but being ready for a final event it's the one about the 10 virgins which we read earlier so they're waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom that's verse 1 five of them were foolish five of them were wise the foolish one took their lamps but didn't take any oil with them the wise took oil the bridegroom was a long time in coming and interestingly you see I what you would think it would say one lot stayed awake because it's all about staying awake and the other lot fell asleep but it doesn't say that so they both fell asleep which makes you scratch your head a little bit doesn't it they became grouchy they all fell asleep then at midnight the bridegroom arrives all of them wake up five of them say well we're not ready we haven't got enough oil and the others say well we've got oil uh I'm afraid we're not going to help you because otherwise we might not have enough and the point being that the foolish ones even though they were asleep they weren't ready for this crisis event when it actually happened they should have got ready a lot earlier but they failed to do that they ordered all evening to make sure they had enough oil but they didn't do it and therein lies their folly now I'm a bit puzzled by it because if they did they all they all went to sleep Jesus says keep watch so I'm a little bit puzzled by why he says keep watch when all of them fell asleep but the point I think he's making is in the sense that be ready for that final event and I'd like to suggest that whereas the middle one about the wise and faithful servant is about carrying on with the things that we know that we should be doing that one with the 10 virgins is about making sure that we're ready on the last day and we've used the intervening time to be ready so I think the steward one is about living the Christian life are we doing what the Lord has made very clear to us we should be doing and I will suggest and in a moment I'll see what comments you have about this that the 10 virgins one is really about the gospel and saying one day you're going to have to stand before your maker when there is the great wedding feast of the Lamb and what will you say on that day are you all prepared for it because on that day it will be too late to go back and get ready you should have been doing that all along and if it comes to that day and you are not prepared you're going to be totally sunk and I'm thinking that this is saying to people don't leave it until the last minute to get yourself right with God you have all the years of your life you have all those all that time when you could have read the Bible you have all that time when you could have prayed you have all that time when if you if you hadn't understood it there was somebody that you could have said I don't understand this Christianity thing can you help me with it you've had all those years you've had all those years when you were thinking I know I haven't quite

got the hang of this

but never mind there'll always be tomorrow and there won't always be a tomorrow and i think this parable is saying get it sorted now don't wait that's a foolish thing to do make sure you've got it all lined up now make sure you understand how to have the forgiveness of sins make sure you understand how to live the life uh indwelt by the holy spirit make sure you've understood how to be born again make sure you've understood how on that last day you'll be able to stand before god and say let me into heaven not because of what i've done but because of what jesus christ has done and now's the time to get that oil all sorted out now's the time to do that don't put it off don't think oh it'll be all right on the night but sort it out now do you see what i mean i think that's the point that he's making be alert don't just go to sleep and say oh it doesn't really matter but be alert and then when you've got that sorted out in a sense you could join these um you could sort of rest easy if you see what i mean because you know that when the day comes you'll be ready so i think that's a slightly different take on it and uh i've got some references in the gospels let me stop there and say what what do you think about this keeping watch in the bit that we've looked at in matthew has anybody got any comments or observations any comments any comments any comments Can do. Yes.

[22 : 45] Thank you. Yes. Yes, that's right. Yes, yes. I've got another illustration about night wear in a moment.

Well, look, you're going to get a microphone. Thank you. You know, you said the five unwise ones, foolish ones, should have got their oil ready.

But I was just thinking in my head, it doesn't matter at one point they would have gone to get the extra oil.

They have no idea when the bridegroom was coming. No, there was still time for them, wasn't there? Up until. But they don't know the time, do they? No, they don't. So, even if they went during the day, maybe the bridegroom might have come then.

You know, it just... Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, with all the sort of parable things, you can't press each point to its ultimate conclusion.

[24 : 02] I mean, the point about this is they should have had the oil when he came. So, I think that they could have got it. They had a long time to get it, didn't they?

They went to sleep during part of it. They certainly didn't turn up prepared. But the crucial point is when the bridegroom came, did they have oil or not? Why didn't the wise ones just share with me? Yeah, that's right. Well, in other contexts, you would have said... That's a Christian thing to do, isn't it? It would have been Christian, wouldn't it? Yeah, but the way Jesus told it, they were commended for not doing it, really, weren't they?

Yes. Yeah. Yeah, yes. Yes. Do you think the wise virgins bought twice as much at the start and the others just did the minimum possible to get through?

Well, that's a thought, isn't it? Our commitment needs to be as much as we can. Yeah, that's a good thought, isn't it? Yes. Yes, they didn't. Yes, it wasn't. They didn't have enough. They didn't. Yeah, that's a very good thought.

[25 : 05] Thank you. Yeah. Ben. Do you think there are... This is saying that there are genuine born-again Christians who will be lost and damned because they weren't ready or they won't be ready?

Or are they just professing Christians? Ah, well, that's two different things. Well, there will be people who profess to be Christians. I mean, we know this from other...

Even from the previous account, there will be people who profess to be Christians, who in the final end will be shown that they didn't really have what it takes.

They weren't really in their heart and life what the master was looking at.

They said the right things outwardly, but it wasn't real. So I'm sure that's the case. Maybe it's the case here with the ten virgins.

[26 : 05] Maybe we're meant to think of people who say they're looking forward to the coming of the bridegroom, but in some very important reality are not ready for that and not in the right state for that.

I don't think... If we were to look under the surface... So as human beings, we can only see what's on the surface. We can't see inside people's hearts.

We can't see into eternity. If we were able to look under the surface at God's secret plans and into the hearts, I am sure that no real Christian will be lost, that all the elect that God has chosen will definitely make it through into the world to come.

But it's just there's a discrepancy between those who are really elect and not everybody who says to me, Lord, Lord, as Jesus says, will enter the kingdom of heaven.

Does that... Yeah. Thank you.

[27 : 18] Hello. I was just saying, I mean, the steward in this parable, he isn't just a bit dozy. I mean, he's wicked. And he begins to beat his servants to eat and drink with drunkards. I mean, that is like, I suppose, that sort of openly sinful behavior.

It's not just like... I mean, he's clearly living in... Not just negligent, is he? No, I mean, he's not just being a bit lazy. He's actually living in sin and not doing what he's supposed to be doing. Yeah. I mean, it's not like a subtle thing.

And I think one could find times in the history of the Church of Jesus Christ where people who have been happy to say they are Christians or maybe even church leaders have lived a very...

Not just a negligent life, but an abusive life. If you think of some of the... I mean, I can't help but think of some of the extreme examples in the history of the medieval church.

Yeah. Okay. Shall we look at another couple of texts? And then we'll think about how. Well, 1 Thessalonians 5 also uses the theme of being awake.

[28 : 35] And I think draws on the idea of the unexpectedness of the final event, but also on the behavior that leads up to it.

1 Thessalonians 5. Now, brothers, about times and dates, we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

While people are saying peace and safety, destruction will come on them suddenly as labor pains on a pregnant woman and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.

You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness, so then let us not be like others who are asleep.

Let us be alert. That's this word, watch, beyond watch. Let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.

[29 : 52] Since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

He died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

There's probably quite a bit to unpack there, but notice in verse 10, that's the use of awake, in which I think he's saying, is he saying whether we are dead or alive, or is he saying whether we are literally awake or literally asleep?

I'm not quite sure about that. But he uses the awake thing or the alert thing in verse 6, let us be on watch, let us be self-controlled.

So one thing is being ready for the coming, and the other is the sort of behavior. So I've put nighttime behavior versus daytime behavior. And he says there is nighttime behavior.

[31 : 07] So you're in your pajamas, you're asleep, probably making various undignified snoring noises, and the sort of behavior that you, is appropriate to nighttime, but isn't appropriate to the daytime.

And he links into it the idea of drunkenness, that you might be drunk at nighttime. But he says that's nighttime behavior, and we don't belong to the nighttime, we are citizenship, we belong to the day that's coming, and we should be living now, like the day that's coming.

So we should be spiritually awake, and he talks about being self-controlled, which I think is the opposite of being sober. So that's to do with, that's a lot to do with lifestyle.

Does that make sense? Let's look at one other text, which is in Revelation. Chapter 16.

Revelation 16.15. Verse 15. Which is entirely like the illustration that Ray mentioned. Revelation 16.15.

[32 : 26] Behold, I come like a thief. Revelation 16.15. Blessed is he who stays awake, or watches, and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.

So, not in your pajamas, but with your clothes all ready, and awake, ready for the coming of the Lord.

Let's think a little bit about how we could stay awake. I've got three suggestions. Maybe you've got some other suggestions as well. So, by coffee. Coffee is very good for keeping you awake.

It's by things that stimulate us to wakefulness, and there's a link between watching and praying, actually. Interesting. One way of staying awake is to pray, and in order to pray, you need to stay awake.

So, I think that's a link that's there in the Bible. Here's a suggestion. How can we stay awake spiritually by praying? And how do we fall asleep spiritually by stopping praying?

[33 : 42] We just sort of lose the plot. You know, it's like falling asleep when you're driving. So nice. Oh, do with that sleep. But, we need to wake up.

I think prayer is one way to do that. Here's another way. By obedient behavior. So, even in the Lord's absence, we're to keep doing what he said we should be doing.

It's so tempting to go to sleep, isn't it? Oh, I don't want to. Why should I bother doing all the things that Christians do? It would be so much easier to do the same thing that everybody else does, and just to fit in with them.

He says, you've got to stay awake. And then, my third suggestion is by gospel preparation. In other words, don't just sleep your way through into eternity.

Don't just leave it, and leave it, and leave it, until it's too late. But now's the time to make sure that you've got the oil. Make sure that you're ready.

[34 : 39] Make sure that on that last day, you won't be looking around thinking, oh dear, I've got this sorted. But you've got it all sorted now, in terms of salvation. So those are my three suggestions.

Anybody like to comment or add? How can we stay awake? Come to sleep? That's one of the obedient behaviors, isn't it?

It's doing what we've been told to get on with doing, and not just sort of sleep and forget to do it. Yeah, thank you. It seems to be quite an emphasis on looking forward.

Yes, looking forward. I think the word has a big emphasis on looking forward, and that's quite a challenge to do that.

But perhaps it should be an interesting, regular discipline for us, to make sure that that is an ingredient in our thinking and praying, rather than a PS to the whole of life.

[36 : 04] So it's not as if we sort of run full throttle in this life, and then we drop dead, and we hope it's okay. But we do remind ourselves fairly regularly, and the church is a good place to be doing that, that actually the now is not the whole.

It is a preparation for something much bigger, much more fulfilling. And it leads me on to another thought, which is if we have that thought fairly regularly, I suppose it makes us a bit more careful about the way that we live.

More careful, because it's easy to just go off the rails rather badly. And the emphasis in the Gospels is that it's a big shame for the Lord to find us sleeping, to find us not about his business, and so forth.

So I think the saints of old did have that kind of regular habit and thought that they would come to the end of their day, each day, and they wouldn't be sort of afraid to pray a prayer of looking forward to the coming of the Lord.

Wouldn't be afraid to pray a prayer that this might be the time when the Lord comes back, rather than saying, I hope he doesn't, because I've got so many more things to do in my life.

[37 : 33] Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes, that's right. I suppose one of the things is that for us in the 21st century, is life so comfortable here, isn't it? It's almost like heaven on earth.

And, well, we have comfort, we have central heating, national health service, we have all sorts of things, whereas the saints of old might have been much closer up to the realities that life is very short and that life is very fragile.

I mean, we can escape that fairly easily, can't we? Yeah, I mean, they certainly encourage one another, and it goes on to say, even more as you see that day approaching.

Yes. So there is that sense of encouragement because of the day that's coming. I mean, when I was a young Christian, as a teenager, I had very much emphasis on the, you know, one, you know, two will be in the field, one will be taken, one will be taken, one will be taken, one will be taken, part

of that, of course, was the theology of the group I was in at the time.

But, you know, I think to a certain extent, these days we've lost that sense that Jesus might return to, or even before the end of today, and are we ready.

[38 : 55] Yes. Whereas you say, our life is quite comfortable and, you know, we're sort of sleepwalking in a sense. Yeah. I don't think sleeping necessarily sort of inhibits, you know, we should stay awake all 24 hours, otherwise we'll, you know, yeah, you just can't keep awake that long, can you?

Again, I think also it's, yeah, there is that sense where they all fell asleep, because we all fall asleep, but they were still ready, the wise virgins were still ready.

Yes, even if the Lord would come in the middle of the night when they were asleep, as it were, they were ready, weren't they? Yeah. Yes. I think it's a good subject for us to think about, as Chris was saying, it's a good subject for us to say, I wouldn't necessarily have thought about that, apart from what Scripture says, and I need to think about the glory that's to come.

I need to think about the coming of the Lord. I mustn't put all my eggs in the basket of this life and all that it has to offer, because it isn't all there is. There is, it has to be put into the perspective of what happens on that great day and what we're headed towards, and we need a push to do that, don't we?

because the flesh isn't so interested in that. I need a push to do that. Thank you.