

Lake Cities Community Church
Pastor Craig Schill
Series: On Your Mark
10-18-09

The Moment Before The Moment
Mark 14:32-42

AMP Up energy drink has a very successful ad campaign called "*The moment before the moment.*" It focuses on that time just before a major event. A cowboy before riding a bull. A comedian before going on stage. Before every moment – there is a moment. And such a moment is often an introspective moment, a psychological moment – praying and thinking about the huge things coming your way. Most of you have experienced a moment before the moment. For example, if you are married, maybe you can remember the anticipation of the wedding day – the nerves and intense feelings. If you have had a child - you might remember that overwhelming feeling and knowledge that your life is about to change forever.

Well, this morning we have the ultimate moment before the moment. It is last moment before Jesus will say, "the hour is at hand." We have the last minutes of Jesus ministry before his arrest. His Jesus' last teaching prior to his death. It is the moment (Jesus praying) before the moment (Jesus' death). As we study about this moment, I want us to consider first, what that moment was like for Jesus. Second, what was it like for the disciples, and third, what the moment before the moment should mean for you and I.

The Moment for Jesus

First, "What was this moment like for Jesus?" To answer that question, first I want to remind us of the theological truth that Jesus was fully God and fully human. And as we

study the Bible, it is not uncommon that certain passages will emphasize either his deity or humanity. Jesus the creator, the omniscient one -- focuses on his deity. Jesus' emotions and suffering (the focus of our passage) emphasizes his humanity. I want to frame our observations in light of Jesus as "the perfect man". He lived as a human, yet without sin. And as the perfect man – I would like to make five observations:

We have our first observation in verses 32-34. [Mark 14:32](#) They came to a place named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here until I have prayed. [Mark 14:33](#) And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. [Mark 14:34](#) And He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch." My first observation is that Jesus as the perfect man...had a strong emotional reaction to dire circumstances. The emotional intensity of the passage is underscored four times. First, Jesus is very distressed – the Greek words means to become quickly alarmed – such as if you discovered an intruder in your home. It is a fast ramp up of intense emotion. Second he is troubled. This word is literally to feel very heavy – like a weight on your shoulders – weighed down by trouble. Third he was deeply grieved – that means that Jesus was very sad, the emotion of sorrow, such as you have when a loved one dies. Jesus is alarmed. He is weighed down. He is sad. How much? To the point of death – and I do not think Mark is using hyperbole. Have you ever felt so badly that you wanted to die? I am not talking about suicidal thoughts – but when the valley is so dark that death seems very close. What we have, some say, is the deepest grieving and sadness you will find in all the pages of Scripture.

So, ironically, I wonder if this might be actually and encouragement to someone. That maybe you need to heard this morning that it OK as a Christian woman or man to

experience strong emotions in response to dire circumstances. Jesus as the perfect man had powerful emotions, yet he did not sin. There is some very damaging teaching in the church that teaches that a Christian should never be upset, or depressed, or feel discouraged. There are well meaning Christian who go to a funeral and say, “Cheer up – don’t be sad.” No! That is wrong! There are time to be sad and weighed down – and that is perfectly normal, it is not sin – as was demonstrated by Jesus Christ, the perfect man.

Walter Hansein, a professor at Fuller Seminary said, “I am spellbound by the intensity of Jesus' emotions: Not a twinge of pity, but heartbroken compassion; not a passing irritation, but terrifying anger; not a silent tear, but groans of anguish; not a weak smile, but ecstatic celebration. Jesus' emotions are like a mountain river cascading with clear water.” Some people teach that the less emotional you are, the more mature you are. OK – just don’t tell that to Jesus. Jesus as the perfect man had strong emotions in the light of dire circumstances.

We find our second observation in verse 35-36: [Mark 14:35](#) *And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by.* [Mark 14:36](#) *And He was saying, “Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.”* From these verses we have several related observations, but over 2nd overall point it that Jesus as a perfect man did not want to go through suffering. Now there is more to it than that... – but first please note that Jesus in his core desire- did not want to go through the humiliation and pain of the cross. He knew what plan “A” was, and he was intently exploring plan “B”.

I think this is an important observation, because we can sometimes find ourselves

believing that as a Christian that we should enjoy suffering. And while we can recognize the benefits of suffering and joyfully accept suffering from God's hand – the Bible does not call us to become spiritual masochists – seeking out pain and suffering. That was the error they made in the middle ages when well-meaning Christians would whip themselves and perform other self-inducing painful acts as signs of Christian maturity. I believe we are reminded here that suffering is part of the Fall and the result of sin. Therefore while God can redeem suffering, we do not seek it out as if it were a virtue. Suffering may teach us patience, but suffering is not a virtue like patience. Jesus as the perfect man did not desire to go through suffering.

The third observation follows close on its heels, and that is that Jesus as the perfect man, prayed that God would remove the suffering from his life. And so we learn it is OK to pray for suffering to end. As Christians, we pray for the healing of diseases. We pray for employment to arrive for those out of work. We pray for safety when traveling. We pray for tears to be turned to joy. *We pray according to God's will – but we do not pray neutral prayers.* We pray for the abatement of suffering, as Jesus did – as the perfect man.

Fourth, and again related, note that Jesus argued with God that the suffering might be removed. Jesus tries to persuade the Father to answer His prayers; **“Abba, Father, all things are possible for you.”** Therefore... perhaps you might have another way. And Mark tells us that after He talks with his disciples, Mark 14:39 **Again He went away and prayed, saying the same words.** He is like the persistent widow – wrestling with God. Arguing, in a good sense, with God that if there be another way. It is OK to pray earnestly for God's deliverance from suffering – Jesus did, and he did so without sin.

Finally, the fifth observation is, by far, the most important, and that is that Jesus as the perfect man, surrendered to the Father's will. After all his praying and arguing, look where he ends up, verse 26: "Yet not what I will, but what you will." He has strong emotions, and those strong emotions come from strong desires – he prays and wrestles with the Father for a plan B, but there is no plan B, and in the end Jesus as the perfect man submits to God's plan for his life. And so also must we!

A man by the name of Judson Van De Venter said the following: "For many years I had been studying art. My whole life was wrapped up in its pursuit. My dream was to become an outstanding and famous artist. After graduating from college, I studied drawing and painting under a well-known German teacher. To help me financially, I taught school and eventually I became supervisor of art in the public schools of Sharon, Pennsylvania. It was during this period in my life that a revival was held in the First Methodist Church of which I was a member. The Spirit of God was urging me to give up teaching and to enter the evangelistic field, but I would not yield. I still had a burning desire to be an artist. This battle raged for five years. At last the time came when I could hold out no longer and I surrendered everything - my time and my talents. It was then that a new day was ushered into my life. I wrote the hymn I Surrender All in memory of the time when, after the long struggle, I had finally surrendered and dedicated my life to the Lord."

All to Jesus, I surrender; All to Him I freely give; I will ever love and trust Him, In His presence daily live. I surrender all. I surrender all. All to Thee my blessed Savior, I surrender all.

The Moment for the Disciples

The moment before the moment. The quiet before the storm. Gethsemane before Golgotha. For Jesus is was an intense wrestling with God that in dramatic fashion end in complete surrender. Now we turn to the disciples. What was this moment like for them? Are the disciples now, at the end of Jesus' ministry going to step-up to the plate? Are they going to rise to the occasion? Are we going to be proud of their courage and faith at last? Well... no, not really. If Jesus is the perfect man, the disciples represent all of us as imperfect people.

To begin, we note that not all the disciples are involved here – just the top of the class; Peter, James and John. His inner circle, and his closest friends. Jesus gives them their assignment in verse 34, “**remain here and keep watch.**” The word is literally; “Stay awake. Be alert.” Why? Perhaps in order to pray, perhaps also to watch for Judas and the mob coming to arrest him. We don't know for sure – by they are to, as my Dad used to say, “Keep their eyes peeled.” Jesus goes off, prays, and returns “**Mark 14:37 And He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Mark 14:38 Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”** Rats! How disappointing. Jesus goes off again to pray and returns: **Mark 14:40 And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him.** Jesus is heavy with the troubles of the world; and they are heavy with sleep. He goes off to pray again. **Mark 14:41 And He came the third time, and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.”**

What was the moment like for Peter, James and John? The disciples as imperfect men... let me give you all three of my observations... were (1) sleeping instead of obeying; were (2) sleeping instead of praying and they (3) had no good excuses. They were suppose to keep watch but they did not. They were suppose to pray but they did not, and when the expression on Jesus' troubled face asks "why?" they have no answer. *They were counting sheep when they should have been caring for the Shepherd.*

So, as a side point, let me ask: Why did they fall asleep? Why didn't they obey and pray? The immediate reason is probably that they just had a big meal, the sun has gone down, there is a cool breeze in the air, and they were just really, really tired. Have you ever been so tired you just could not keep your eyes open? We can understand that. But do you think that if you knew that you in five minutes thieves were going to come and bust down your door, that you might be able to overcome that sleepiness? The real reason they fell asleep is because they were asleep spiritually. They didn't realize they were in the moment before the moment. They still wanted to pretend everything was OK. They didn't take seriously Jesus warnings about denial and betrayal. Remember in chapter 13, Jesus said Mark 13:33 "Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the *appointed time will come....*Mark 13:36 in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. Mark 13:37 "What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'" But unfortunately, rather than being alert they are asleep. Rather than seeing, they are blind. The moment before the moment, for them, was a colossal failure!

Application.

So how do we apply this passage? I would suggest the logic goes this way: When you face stressful suffering or a difficult situation surrender to God in prayer; do not succumb to spiritual sleep. In other words; when you are really struggling – take your desires and emotions to God, through prayer. Wrestle with Him. Ask for the suffering to be removed; and then surrender to His will, no matter what it is because He is sovereign, and He is good. The temptation, however, during such times is to not pray and not obey. During difficult times we withdraw and fall asleep spiritually. We are tempted to take control, rather than surrendering. When you face stressful situations, surrender to God in prayer, do not succumb to spiritual sleep.

Conclusion:

I would like to close with this story. A few days ago I finished reading a biography of Winston Churchill – that great war leader during WWII. Churchill had a moment before the moment. The year was 1936. I am reading from his biography.

“Churchill wrote dozens of articles warning that Hitler was secretly rearming Germany and that he would one day try to rule the world. From his seat in Parliament Churchill warned his country again and again to prepare for the Nazi threat.

His warnings were unheeded. The general attitude of both the government and the English people was that Churchill was dramatizing and exaggerating again. Besides, most Britishers recalled too vividly the dark days of World War I.

Fortunately there were some important people in England who understood and agreed with what Churchill was saying. They did everything in their power to arouse

England from its lethargy. Yet even in 1936 when Hitler flagrantly violated the Versailles Treaty by moving his armies into the demilitarized zone of the Rineland, England slumbered on.”

We are in a spiritual battle and it is no time to fall asleep – we want to believe everything is OK. Sin is no big deal. Just leave me along... yawn. No! The hour is at hand – danger is on the doorstep. Open your eyes – see the danger and bring everything you have to the Lord. Pray and wrestle with God, but in the end pray like Jesus did, “Not my will, but Your, O Lord, be done.”