



# Minutes With Messiah

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## SAVED TO SERVE

He that is great-est Should be as the younger And he that is chief As he that would serve.  
 Fil-ling a ba-sin And tak-ing a tow-el, Our Lord washed their feet. Like him we should serve.  
 I am your ser-vant And you are my ser-vant. We both serve one head, And us all he serves.

I'm saved to serve, Not to sit back; Not to be served; Like Je-sus, to serve.  
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Song written for Spiritual Explosion, a youth rally at the Riverside congregation in Albuquerque, NM. This year's theme is, as the title suggests, is "Saved to Serve."

Spiritual Explosion XVIII will be held April 13-15, 2018. Youth (or adults) wishing to attend should contact the Riverside Church of Christ in Albuquerque for details and housing reservations.

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# ***NO SLEEP DEPRIVATION HERE***

Babies sleep a lot. But then there comes a time when a parent cannot get the child to sleep at all. They don't want naps, and don't want to go to bed at night. Finally, one may reach an age when an afternoon nap is *de rigueur*. Sleep can be a wonderful thing. To some people, the dream job would be that of Li'l Abner in the comic strip: professional mattress tester. (Which, by the way, is a real job; people get paid to sleep under various conditions or to test products.) Not surprisingly, the Bible has a lot to say about sleep.

## **While you were sleeping**

One of the problems with sleeping is that the world goes on. Morning news shows are popular, first because they give the day's weather report, but also because they tell you what happened while you were sleeping. Sometimes there isn't much to report. After all, half the world was probably asleep with you. Sometimes you may have slept through a big story, as President Reagan supposedly did when the U.S. bombed Libya.

Sometimes the significant event may even have happened to you without your knowledge. Such was the case with King Saul of Israel, on more than one occasion. For a man bent on destroying his rival, he slept a lot when he shouldn't have. One time he went into a cave where

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Sleeping can be dangerous, especially sleeping while the preacher is talking.

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David happened to be hiding to "cover his feet." While many versions of the Bible interpret this as "to relieve himself," some think it meant he went in to take a nap. This seems to make more sense, because while he was in the cave David cut off a piece of his robe, but refused to kill him. (1 Sam 24) On another occasion (1 Sam 26), David snuck into Saul's camp while he was sleeping, and took his spear and his water jug. On that occasion even the guards were sleeping.

Nor are guards sleeping on watch an unusual occurrence. Acts 16 tells of Paul and Silas in prison. About midnight an earthquake opened all the doors of the cells.

And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. (Acts 16:27)

That guard was ready to kill himself because he knew the consequence of sleeping on watch and losing a prisoner. Other guards were awake, but were told to claim they were asleep while Jesus arose from the grave.

They gave large money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day. (Matt 28:12-15)

Although they weren't soldiers, even the apostles slept on watch. They almost missed something very important while they were sleeping.

And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour? Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak. And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words. And when he returned, he found them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy,) neither wist they what to answer him. And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand. (Mk 14:37-42)

Sometimes it might be better to sleep instead of suffering insomnia. "On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king." (Esth 6:1) What he read in the book eventually led to the potential genocide of the Jewish people, and their ultimate salvation celebrated by the holiday of Purim.

On the other hand, sleeping can be dangerous, especially sleeping while the preacher is talking. Such was the case of Eutychus, who fell asleep and fell out of a third story window. Fortunately for him, Paul was the preacher, and brought him back to life. (Acts 20) It was dangerous to Samson as well, for it was as he slept that Delilah had his hair cut, causing him to lose his strength. (Judg 16)

## **To sleep; perchance to dream**

To die, to sleep,

To sleep, perchance to Dream; aye, there's the rub, for in that sleep of death, what dreams may come, when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, must give us pause. (Hamlet, III, i)

Hamlet may have worried about whether one dreams in death, but many others experienced significant

dreams in sleep. Sometimes these prophetic dreams were good for the dreamer; sometimes not so good.

Joseph was an interpreter of dreams. While he was imprisoned unjustly he interpreted a good dream (the butler's) and a bad dream (the baker's). (Gen 40) He later interpreted the dreams of the Pharaoh, and was made second in the kingdom. Of course, Joseph was a dreamer himself, which was part of why he was in prison in the first place.

Daniel also interpreted dreams. They may not have directly gotten him into trouble, but they were not always good for the dreamer. One dream by Nebuchadnezzar (and later by himself) showed the history of the world from the Babylonian through Roman empires and the establishment of Christianity. Another foretold a time when Nebuchadnezzar would be punished for his pride.

Dreams while people were asleep played significant roles in the life of Jesus. His father Joseph, like his many-times-great-uncle, had dreams. Before Jesus was born he was warned in a dream not to put away Mary because she was pregnant. (Matt 1) After he was born, Joseph was warned in a dream to flee to Egypt to save the child. (Matt 2:13) Even later he was told to return (Matt 2:19), and not to settle in Jerusalem, also to save the child. (Matt 2:22) The Magi were warned in a dream not to tell Herod where the child was. (Matt 2:12) Those dreams were obeyed. Many years later, though, Pontius Pilate's wife suffered in a dream about Jesus (Matt 27:19); and when she told her husband to have nothing to do with him, she was ignored. Pilate's political career suffered as a result, and his name has become a byword even to this day.

## He is not dead

Often the Bible speaks of death as a sleep. This may have inspired Hamlet's suicide soliloquy. It certainly inspired Raymond Chandler's title, *The Big Sleep*.

On one occasion Jesus claimed that a dead person was merely asleep. "He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn." (Matt 9:24) They probably stopped laughing when he brought the lass out alive.

Another time, Jesus knew Lazarus had died, and that he would successfully raise him from the dead. When he told the disciples that Lazarus slept, they misunderstood him.

After that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. (Jn 11:11-13)

This metaphor for death seems to have been a favorite of Paul. In talking of the final resurrection, he

said, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." (1 Cor 15:51) When he wrote the church in Thessalonica about the final coming of Jesus, he observed, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." (1 Thes 4:14)

## Awake, O sleeper

Sleep is, typically, a good thing. Sleep refreshes us. A total lack of sleep eventually drives us insane. Whenever we sleep, though, we always wake up; and the need to do so is a common message in the Bible.

The writers of the proverbs frequently wrote of the dangers of sleep. "Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger." (Prov 19:15) "Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread." (Prov 20:13)

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Pilate's political career suffered as a result of ignoring a dream, and his name has become a byword even to this day.

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They even repeated one warning twice, which is the Jewish way of saying to pay close attention.

Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man. (Prov 6:10-11; 24:33-34)

Paul seems to have taken a role as an alarm clock personally. He not only wrote about rising from the sleep of death, but warned people to wake right now.

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. (Rom 13:11-12)

We are not to be in darkness, but to be in the light of day. Quoting a passage now lost to us, Paul told the Ephesians:

But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. (Eph 5:13-14)

Most of us like sleep; some more than others. It is, after all, a fact of life. Even fish and plants sleep. We just have to be careful when, how, and how long we do it.

# *BELIEVE IT; RECEIVE IT*

They say that every myth has a kernel of truth in it. Somebody once existed that did something similar to what is done in the myth. It was on that basis that Heinrich Schliemann discovered the ancient cities of Troy. He followed clues from Homer, and started digging. And there it was, under several rebuildings.

If every myth has a kernel of truth in it, so does every heresy. No Bible believer would fall away from the truth if there wasn't at least a little truth to lead them to do so. Each congregation has elders, so why not establish a single elder over congregations in an area; and thus we end up with one earthly "head" over all congregations. Israel had judges and other nations had kings; there really isn't much difference, is there? Didn't God say you could eat of the fruit of every tree in the garden? And so it goes.

"If you believe it, you will receive it." This mantra of the prosperity gospel bears enough truth to be dangerous. Jesus did say, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." (Matt 21:22) That sounds a lot like the teaching that God wants you to prosper, and all you have to do is ask. But is that what Jesus said? Not entirely.

Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

The context of the passage is interesting. Jesus was hungry and had gone up to a fig tree that had leaves but no figs. He cursed the tree, and the next day it was dead. The disciples were surprised, and so he taught them as in this passage.

To carry the passage to its contextual conclusion, if you pray for harm to be done to someone, God will answer. So it is not just prosperity that comes, but vengeance. Since that flies in the face of what Paul said in Romans 12:9 ("Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."), there must be limits on the "blab it and grab it" doctrine. God (or "the universe") is not obligated to give you everything you ask for.

James had a different take on the prosperity gospel. He made two statements about it.

Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. (Jas 4:2-3)

The first part sounds like what Jesus said in Matthew 21:22; however he modifies the conditions of that statement. You won't receive if you don't ask, but you won't receive if you do ask for the wrong reason. If you are asking out of vengeance, obviously God has no obligation to respond. If you ask for prosperity (wealth, health, long life) for yourself, God has no obligation to respond because you are asking "that ye may consume it upon your lusts." If truth be told, God is under no obligation to you under any circumstances.

But doesn't God want me to be happy, as some preachers say? That may depend on a definition of happiness. Yes, God wants you to be happy in the way he defines happiness, not necessarily in the way you do. Happiness is submission and giving, not money in the bank. (Matt 5:1-12; Acts 20:35)

If you believe it, you'll receive it. But only as long as you plan on using it to God's glory.

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