

Stay Awake

By Rod McDonald



Ishmael must stay awake. He sits at the gate to the entrance of the Bushbaby Lodge in Uganda. Whenever anyone departs or arrives, he opens the gate. He must stay awake because he never knows when anyone will arrive. They could come in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning. And the roosters, in fact, crow at the Bushbaby Lodge.

Jesus' final words of the Olivet Discourse:

“And what I say to you, I say to all: stay awake.” (Mark 13:37 ESV) If Ishmael stays awake for the honored guests, much more should we stay awake for Jesus' return—much, much more.

On a warm evening, Ishmael's eyes become heavy, and sleep creeps upon him. Then, he hears the rumbling of a vehicle over the rough dirt roads. On a dry day, he sees the dust rising from far off. He's roused and stands alert because of the signs. But there will be no signs of Jesus' return.

But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. —Matthew 24:43, 44 ESV

Ishmael is accustomed to staying awake. Visitors come and go all the time. He runs to the gate, opens it, and closes it. But Jesus is coming one time. There is no getting accustomed to something that occurs only once; we must live by faith. If Ishmael sleeps, there may be unpleasant consequences. But if we sleep, eternal disaster. We, like the foolish virgins in the parable, may hear, “Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.”

When Ishmael opens the gate to visitors, he knows nothing of where they are from or where they are going. Nor does he care. Their business is their own. Likewise, the

important visitors themselves care little for the insignificant man with vacant eyes holding open the gate. Jesus' return is wholly different. He cares for those who stay awake. He comes, in fact, to receive them to himself, that where he is, there they may be also. Likewise, we groan inwardly, longing for his return. He is our God, we are his people.

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

—Mark 13:26, 27 ESV

When the faithful women brought spices to Jesus' tomb and saw instead a young man dressed in a white robe, who said to them, “Do not be alarmed...,” they were alarmed. They “fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them.” (Mark 16:8a ESV) But when the Son of Man comes, sending out innumerable angels to the four winds to gather those who have stayed awake, there will also be trembling and astonishment. And great joy.

Jonathan Edwards resolved to stay awake, and one day wrote:

Resolved never to do anything which I should be afraid to do, if I expected it would not be above an hour before I should hear the last trump.

Paul's little, persecuted church in Thessalonica often thought of Jesus' return. He gave them specific instructions on how to stay awake:

So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

—1 Thessalonians 5:6-8 ESV

Isn't the beginning of your hope enough for you to stay awake?

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