

The View From the E.D.

Matthew 24:36-44

Come gather 'round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you is worth savin'
And you better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'

The line it is drawn
The curse it is cast
The slow one now
Will later be fast
As the present now
Will later be past
The order is rapidly fadin'
And the first one now
Will later be last
For the times they are a-changin'

In October 1963 Bob Dylan wrote that song. It would become an anthem of a generation. With over 270 million streams on Spotify perhaps it is *still* an anthem of a generation?

Some have called it a protest song, but it's not a protest song, it's a song about perception. A song about seeing. What Dylan is saying is: "Wake up! Open your eyes! See what's going on around you".

A month after he wrote the song President John F Kennedy was assassinated. The times were a-changing.

Wake up! Open your eyes! 60 years later . . . in the 21st century, we hear the same cry mirrored on social media with the hashtag 'Stay Woke'. Which, originally, was an African-American way of saying 'Stay awake'! Stay awake to the injustice happening around you. Stay awake to the inequality. Be aware!

Nowadays the term 'woke' is used by some with pride and by others as a term of mockery. Whatever the case, the call remains the same . . . the song remains the same . . . it's still about perception . . . do you perceive what's going on in the world?

But, none of this is new, or original. Both Dylan and current day activists are only echoing what was said 2000 years ago by an itinerant preacher named Jesus.

Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner 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 unexpected hour.

Stay awake! It's the same cry. Notice what's going on. See what others don't see.

But why? Why would we bother to stay awake . . . to watch? Does it really matter? Isn't it better to be tucked up in our beds asleep?

Well, the classic reaction to this text is to think it means we have to warn the *world*. It's the wild-looking street preacher waving a placard with the words: "Repent! The end of the world is nigh!" As if we can scare people into staying awake . . . as if we can scare people into the kingdom.

That's one response, but I've always found that fear can be a great short-term motivator, but it's a horrible way to live. In fact, it's not really living if you're living in fear. And, how many times do we hear in the Bible the words, "*Don't* be afraid"? How many times does Jesus say that? "Don't be afraid"? So, we're not s'posed to live this life in fear just so we can appreciate the contrast in the next life! That's not what Jesus wants . . . for anyone.

In any case, Jesus is speaking here to his disciples, not to the crowds. So, this is not a warning to the world . . . to stay awake, this is not a suggestion to walk down Rundle Mall with a placard. This is an urging specifically for the disciples. Jesus is quite emphatic . . . YOU . . . you disciples stay awake!

Again, we might ask why? Well, not because of fear. As far as I can tell the disciples didn't live in fear when they were around Jesus. Sure, there were moments when they were afraid . . . mainly when they realised their sinfulness, or when they thought Jesus was no longer with them, but mostly they lived in amazement and joy and wonder of what Jesus was doing. And, especially after Jesus' resurrection they lived *fearlessly*! They knew who Jesus was. They knew what he had done. They had experienced the new life he had promised. They knew his love, his commitment, his forgiveness, his grace. So, they lived fearlessly.

"Stay awake ", Jesus urges them. Why?

Well, I think I got an insight into that a few weeks ago when I took my older son into the emergency department at Flinders Hospital. He had badly twisted his foot and we thought it might be broken. We arrived at 8 o'clock on the Monday night and we left at 7 o'clock on the Tuesday morning. There was nothing to do except sit and wait. For 11 hours we sat. For 11 hours I stayed awake. Why? Why wasn't I tucked up in my bed fast asleep? Well, it wasn't that I was afraid for him. A broken foot is hardly life or death! I stayed awake because I didn't want him to wait alone. I wanted him to know I cared. I wanted him to be able to sleep if *he* needed without worrying. I wanted to be there for him. If he did fall asleep I

didn't want him to wake up without support. I stayed awake because he is my son. I stayed awake because I care.

Jesus' call to his disciples . . . to all disciples to stay awake is a call to see what's going on around us . . . to be awake to the world . . . to the needs of the world. It's a call to care.

What do you see when you look around your neighbourhood? I see big houses and manicured lawns. I see high fences and expensive cars. I see wealth and power. I see security and stability. I see comfort. And, maybe that lulls me into sleepiness. Maybe it lulls me into *not* seeing . . . not perceiving. Because maybe big houses means big mortgages. And maybe big mortgages means long work days. And maybe long work days mean tiredness . . . and exhaustion . . . and disconnection . . . and alienation . . . and loneliness . . . and despair.

Maybe.

I can't be certain, and I'll only know if I know my neighbour. If I stay awake to my world. A world that is perhaps falling asleep thinking that the big house and the wealth and the power and the comfort is a fair exchange for a lack of connection . . . and community . . . and family . . . and love.

"YOU stay awake". Jesus says to his disciples. Because you know me. You know who I am. You know why I'm here. Stay awake for the sake of the world. Because when the world wakes up in the emergency department, I don't want it to be staring into the bare walls of loneliness and despair . . . I want it to see love and community and connection. I want it to see me. Jesus.

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