

## **Wake Up Now**

### **2 Kings 6:15-17**

We are entering into the 40 Days of Prayer with the Christian and Missionary Alliance to start off this new year. This is the first of 6 weeks and I'm planning to preach 5 sermons to coincide with the themes our Alliance leadership is providing. The overall theme for the series is "Now. Pray." and is meant to remind us that there is an urgency when it comes to prayer – it's something that's very important when it comes to our involvement in God's kingdom, God's will, and his communication and partnership with us. God wants us to engage in prayer now.

But the only way we're going to do that – the only reason we're going to pray, is if we're first awakened to and living with the awareness of the spiritual world and spiritual life that we're in. So the theme for this first week is "Wake up now." If you're following the daily devotionals from the Alliance, you've been thinking about that this week and that's what I want to focus on in the message this morning. Wake up now. Wake up to the spiritual reality that we're living in.

One of the most startling wake up calls I received was about 20 years ago. I was the youth pastor here and had been planning my very first youth missions trip to Reynosa Mexico. We had a team of about 15 students and chaperones and had been preparing for this trip for several months and we were leaving the next morning. The bus was set to arrive at 5:00am, and we had to pick up another group after us, so I remember telling our group the night before: "Don't be late!"

Amy and I went to bed, and the next thing I remember is that I was awakened by a phone call from one of our chaperones. It was 5:00am, departure time, and they were wondering where we were. I went from deep sleep to panic mode in about half a second. I don't know what happened, but my alarm didn't go off and I was late for the very trip I was in charge of!

I think the Alliance leadership realizes that from time to time, we need a wake up call to remind us that we're living in the midst of monumental spiritual realities. The Bible reveals that we are living in two worlds – the seen and unseen, the physical and spiritual. The physical world is by far the most obvious. It's the world we interact with all the time with our 5 senses – taste, touch, sight, sound, and smell. This is the world that dominates our attention because we are physical beings in a physical world.

But there is also a spiritual world, an invisible world that we interact with by our spirit – that immaterial part of us by which we relate to God. The spiritual world includes the presence of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, heaven and hell and all that's in them, salvation, condemnation, angels and demons, miracles, supernatural power, eternal life. Monumental spiritual realities. Everything about the Gospel that we believe as Christians is founded upon the existence of the spiritual world.

Yet the spiritual world is often ignored, or forgotten by Christians, especially in the day and age in which we live. Part of that is because of the never-ending demands of the physical world that cry out constantly for our attention. From the moment we wake up to the moment we go to bed, the physical world is beckoning us – get out of bed, brush your teeth, shovel the snow, eat breakfast, drop your kids off, go to work, put gas in the car, pick your kids up, drop them off again... fix supper, do dishes, pay bills, go to the basketball game, answer the phone, respond to text messages and notifications, watch your favorite show, do some exercise, fix the car, clean the house, get ready for bed... and so on. It's never ending and can easily demand all our focus. Anything you give it, it will take. So it can be really easy to forget that there's a spiritual world with incredible spiritual realities.

If that doesn't make it hard enough, the spiritual world can also get pushed aside by the scientific and secular worldview that we've been conditioned with in our modern society. Ancient peoples acknowledged the reality of the spiritual realm because it's how they understood the things that were happening around them. There were all kinds of false religions and bizarre ideas of what was going on, but everyone believed in the spiritual.

But then something called the scientific revolution happened and people discovered that there were actually physical causes behind many of the things they used to think were spiritual – things like snow, lightning, thunder, wind, sunrises, moon phases, diseases, volcanoes, and so on. Some scientists pushed this discovery so far that they assumed that there is a physical and scientific answer behind everything and there is nothing spiritual. There are no gods and goddesses, no angels and demons, no heaven and hell, no divine creator, no miracles, nothing. No spiritual, only physical. That mentality spread and has been passed down and taught for many generations and now we have been

conditioned to view the world and our lives here on earth as physical or mental, but not spiritual. It's part of the culture we swim in every day.

So it's easy for us, even as Christians, to approach life without paying much attention to the spiritual world and there are times when we need to wake up.

One of the passages used in the devotionals this week was 2 Kings 6:8-23. It's the story of a young man who was suddenly awakened to the spiritual reality around him. The King of Syria was angry with the prophet Elisha because anytime he tried to set a trap to try to capture the king of Israel, God would reveal that plan to Elisha and he would warn the king. The King of Syria eventually found out about this, so he sent a great army to surround the city in which Elisha was staying so he could capture him.

This is what it says in 2 Kings 6:15-17: *"When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, 'Alas, my master! What shall we do?'"*<sup>16</sup> *He said, 'Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.'*<sup>17</sup> *Then Elisha prayed and said, 'O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.'" So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."*

For that moment, that man was allowed to see beyond the physical realm and into the spiritual. He was awakened to the reality of the spiritual world he was living in. And we need to be awake as well.

The problem with being oblivious to the spiritual world around us is that we will end up wasting our lives. We will be ineffective and unproductive in the things that really matter. We will have the knowledge of Christ, but our lives will be fruitless. We won't care about the things of God. We won't grow spiritually. We won't care where other people are at spiritually or that many are still spiritually lost. We will rely on our own strength rather than God. We won't pray. We'll worry and become anxious. We'll fear death. We'll grieve like those who have no hope. And our whole life will be fixated on the here and now. We won't be salt or light in the kingdom of God.

Paul instructed the Ephesian Christians to watch out for that kind of life in Ephesians 4:17-24: *"Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer*

*walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. <sup>18</sup> They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. <sup>19</sup> They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. <sup>20</sup> But that is not the way you learned Christ!— <sup>21</sup> assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, <sup>22</sup> to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, <sup>23</sup> and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, <sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

It's possible for believers to live worthless lives, in futility and ignorance, by focusing only on the physical or sensual. So Paul calls us away from that by putting off our sinful habits, being renewed in the spirit of our minds, and putting on the new self. This is the shift from living only according to the physical to stepping into the spiritual. It's when we make that shift and live that way that our lives have meaning and impact for God.

Paul had that desire for the new Christians in the churches he planted and we read about that in Col. 1:9-10: *“And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup> so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”* Paul knew that in order to live a life that counts and bear fruit for God, they needed to be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. They needed to be awake to the spiritual.

For that reason, in Col. 3:1-3 he tells them: *“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”*

And so, this first sermon and first week of our 40 Days of Prayer is a call to Wake Up Now. Are you awake? Are you living according to the monumental spiritual realities revealed in Scripture, or only caught up in the demands of the here and now?

The reality is, that as long as we live in these physical bodies in this physical world, it's going to be a struggle. Our tendency is going to be to fade, forget, and neglect.

And so, we need to work some things into the natural patterns of our lives in order to stay spiritually awake. God's people have been doing this from the very beginning – we find examples in Scripture and they're often referred to as "Spiritual Disciplines." These are the kinds of things we need to work into our lives...

The first is daily prayer – prayer is the underlying theme of this whole series and prayer is central to our spiritual lives. Simply put, prayer is communication with God. Prayer is a spiritual practice – your spirit, or inner being, is communicating with God's Spirit, and it can take on many forms. I think it's something that can happen automatically throughout your day if you're living in the awareness of the spiritual. You might whisper up prayers of praise or thanksgiving when you realize a blessing from above. You might ask for help for you or someone else when you become aware of a need. Prayer includes confession of sin when you know you've disobeyed God. Again, if you're living with the awareness of God in your life, and your relationship with him, you will just pray.

But prayer can also be a spiritual discipline – something you plan into the pattern of your everyday life. Perhaps prayer can be the practice that brings you into the needed awareness of the spiritual. So maybe you plan to pray right away when you get up in the morning. Maybe you learn to pray before meals. Maybe you pray every time you get into your car. You could pray every time you hear a siren, or maybe you set an alarm on your phone. The more ways you can learn to turn to prayer, the more you will shift your attention from the physical to the spiritual.

The second discipline is daily Bible study. The written Word of God is where we learn all about what's going on in the spiritual realm and all of us need to learn more. It opens our eyes to what God has done in the past, what he's doing in the present, and what he'll do in the future. But the word of God isn't just an informational book about the spiritual, it also contains the very words of God himself and is therefore the way we get to know God and hear his voice. God's Spirit communicates with our spirit while we read the Word and he illuminates our minds to understanding what he has to say. So reading God's Word is vital for being engaged in the spiritual. Again, you can do this right away when you get up in the morning. You can get a daily Bible reading app on your phone. Maybe you want to read right before bed. Whatever you do, work on making it a daily practice.

Another important discipline is engaging in Christian fellowship. None of us is supposed to be a spiritual island. We each are only one part of the whole body of Christ and we need each other in order to experience the spiritual presence and blessings of Christ in his Church. We are spiritually blessed and refreshed through serving and being served, through conversations about the Lord, through encouragement and prayer. We need one another to help us keep our minds on Christ and the spiritual realities. For this reason it's vital to engage in weekly worship – in person, not over the internet. It's also vital to meet in small groups and regular relationships with other believers. We can help one another keep our eyes fixed on the unseen.

Other spiritual disciplines can include fasting, Scripture memory, singing, spending time in nature, solitude, silence, and journaling. I think you can be creative – whatever helps bring you into the awareness of God and what he's doing here on earth. But the point in all these things is to fit them into the pattern of our regular lives so that every day and multiple times during the day we will have reminders of the spiritual realm.

I want you to actually take a moment now, to plan some action. If this is an area of your life that you really need to work on, I want you to think of one or two things you can do to fit a spiritual discipline into the pattern of your life to help you stay awake spiritually. What is something you can begin to do this week, maybe even today? Write it down or put a reminder on your phone so you will start doing it. It's a great time of year to make some changes and most importantly in regards to your spiritual health.