

A Warning Against Lazy Praying

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Last weekend, Diego and I were in Nicaragua. And I wanted to bring some messages down there on some of the fundamentals. I was standing in the pulpit Sunday afternoon. A text really jumped out at me. I mean, it was one of the texts I was preaching from, but just at that moment in the pulpit, it really came with unusual significance to my own mind. And I thought that maybe today I would bring approximately what I brought down there last Sunday afternoon. Maybe not exact. The text that jumped out at me is found in Ephesians 6. And I'd have you turn there. It was dealing with prayer. Of course, Ephesians 6:10: We have the armor of God; the whole armor of God unfolded for us here.

Specifically, the verse that deals with prayer is found in v. 18. "Praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication." It was these words specifically that really jumped off the page at me. "To that end, keep alert." That's the ESV rendering. Your Bible may say, "being vigilant in it," "keeping alert in it," or the old KJV, "watch in the same." What's the same? Or "it" - vigilant in "it"? Vigilant in prayer. Keeping alert in prayer. Watching in prayer. That's the same. That's the context. That's what he's dealing with here. It really jumped at me. Keeping alert or keeping vigilant. Or keeping watchful.

And I guess I wonder several things: how much do we think about that when we think about our prayer life? When we think about our prayer life, how much do we connect the idea of watchfulness to prayer? How many of you think of our prayer meetings that way? Watchfulness. Alertness. In fact, you even ask the question, how do they go together? What's the dynamic? Is it that as we pray, somehow prayer makes us more watchful? Or do we pray that God would make us watchful, and then He does? Or is it we're watchful ahead of time, and then we come into prayer? I mean, how do the two fit together? Prayer and watchfulness.

Or look over at Colossians 4. Many of you know, Ephesians, Colossians... Not by a long shot are they exact parallels, but there's no doubt there are a lot of parallel thoughts that run through these two epistles. Notice Colossians 4:2. "Continue steadfastly in prayer." Or, "devote yourselves to prayer." Now watch this: "Being watchful in it." And actually, the being vigilant in it, or keeping alert in it, or watching of the same, it comes from this text, not actually the Ephesians 6:18 text. Eph 6:18, "To that end, keep alert." But here, "be watchful in it, with thanksgiving." Being watchful. Being vigilant. Keeping alert. Watching in the same.

So the question that I have today is, how? How are we to be watchful? What does it mean? I mean, watchful doesn't mean just to look at. That's not the idea. It's the idea of being observant, careful, cautious, wary, alert. And one story that I started the sermon down in Nicaragua with, and I think it's a good one. Some of you might think it's out in left field. But listen, a lot of you folks here remember two, three years back. Somebody that we have had speak. We don't live stream it. We don't record it. Because this man operates covertly. Many of you were there several years back when he told this story. My wife and I sat at a table with him at lunch, and we got a personal rendition of this story.

Brethren, I don't know what your thoughts are on the angelic. You might think this is crazy. But I'm going to remind you of this story. You may remember. This man. He works with

the underground church. He's able to get in and out of that country. He talks about one trip that he made there. Unusually gripped with fear. Spiritual. He's not always gripped with the same kind of fear, but this trip he was gripped with fear. And he made a visit to one of the underground church's pastor's. And he said, he was talking to this man. This man was telling him about the persecution. He was telling him about the Christians that had been put to death, imprisoned. He was telling him about people that had just disappeared, and they had not heard anything. And he said very often, a black car pulls up, people are hauled into it, and they're never heard from again. Or word may come to the family long afterwards that they were executed, or that they're in prison. The man was also telling him about people in the underground church who had fled the country to escape the persecution. But the church was just being riddled between people who were falling away because of the persecution, or who were being captured and executed, or imprisoned. Even within the church, there were those that were spies.

And he said this specific trip, all of that, all of those reports, and maybe something even beyond that. He was gripped with an unusual fear. And he had it in his mind that he was going to be discovered. And he was here at the conference, and he was relating this to us. One of his recent trips at that time. And he said that as they were bringing their conversation to an end, the pastor said, "Brother, let me pray for you." Now ordinarily, he might have gone there to encourage them, and to pray for them, and to uphold them. But here all of a sudden, and he said there was something unusual, it was unusual that he wasn't in the place where he was praying for the ones being persecuted. Rather, this pastor said, "Let me pray for you." And immediately, he wondered, why? And he said the man began to pray for him. And he was praying. Praying that this man would not be discovered, that he would be helped, that he would be delivered. And this prayer did nothing to comfort this brother. All it did was grip him with deeper fear, and he started asking the question, Why? Why is this man praying for me this way? And he said he left that man's house, and he was walking down the alley, and he was so overcome by fear at that point. And he's looking over his shoulder. And he said he just knew he was going to look back and see one of these black cars fly up behind him. Gripped with fear. He thought certainly he had been discovered. It was totally unusual. I'm certain there was a supernatural element to all of this.

And those of you that were there, you remember his story. He said that as he was walking along, suddenly God did - and I've heard other good men, men you would know and respect, it's even happened in Scripture, and you know it - Elisha - you may remember, eyes being opened. There are places in Scripture where people's eyes are opened into the spiritual realm. He said for a moment, his eyes were opened to look into the spiritual realm. And undoubtedly, God did this to comfort him. A man who is risking his life going into a country - a very closed country, a very dangerous country. And he had his eyes open. And what did he see? He said he saw basically surrounding him, all the way around, 360 degrees. He saw angelic beings all the way around him. Moving out away from him. He was in the middle. And they were all encircling him. Packed around him. He said they were up on top of the buildings. And there was an overpass, and they were up there. They were everywhere around him. Hovering about a foot off the ground. And then, just that fast, he couldn't see anymore.

But do you know what he told us? None of them were looking at him. He said they were all faced away from him, and they were all looking, and they were all watching. He said their eyes were out on the horizon... Watching. Watching. And you know that has always stuck with me. Watch. They were watching. Undoubtedly, he was given a vision. He was given insight into the spiritual realm that as lonely as he felt, and as in danger as he felt, God showed him he was not alone. Just like in the days of Elisha. The eyes were open. Those who are for us are greater than those who are for them. And his eyes were opened. But it was where these angelic beings were looking. They were watching. They were intently gazing.

Now I want to bring you over to the New Testament. The disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 26:37. Matthew 26:37 You know this account. The Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus - this is hours before the cross. This is the very eve of the Lord's trial and His sufferings. And it's not as though He wasn't suffering already. "And taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to be sorrowful and troubled." And you want to notice this. "He said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful.'" How sorrowful, Lord? "...even to death." I am experiencing sorrow at a level that has Me hanging on the very thresholds of My spirit being torn from My body. Notice this. "'Remain here and watch with Me.' And going a little farther, He fell on His face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.' And He came to the disciples, and found them sleeping. And He said to Peter, 'Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.'"

Brethren, think of this. Think of the very situation, the conditions, the circumstances in which these men are sleeping. Spiritual kingdoms of good and evil are moving. The Son of God is facing the realities of the cross. His very soul - sorrowful to the point of death. His spirit, brethren... He is under an anguish. His sweat became, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Why? His anguish is to that degree. Brethren, this is the very eve of the pinnacle of redemptive history. Everything is on the line. If He fails, these disciples perish. Their very eternal welfare depends on everything that's unraveling here. The most colossal events in human history are unfolding.

You read the account in the different Gospels. Luke tells us an angel is dispatched to strengthen Him. He who knew so sin, in just a few hours, is going to become sin. And the weight of bearing sin; the weight of being separated and forsaken of God. Brethren, He is under temptation to deny all of this. You remember how Satan tempted Him. "You don't have to go to the cross. You just fall down and worship me and it will all be yours." The temptation has always been this. And you see it in His very words. "Father, if it's possible, take this cup away." That's the temptation. Run from it. Run from the cup! Run from it! Conflict of soul. Brethren, for Christ to fail here is for them to be damned. And can you imagine it? They're over there sleeping.

The reason I want to preach this message to you, is because I don't want us sleeping. In fact, I entitled this, "A Warning Against Lazy Praying" Brethren, the fear is that just like these disciples in the garden, we could fall asleep and not watch. The battle rages around us, and God forbid that we should be found sleeping. Somebody says, "Wake up! Wake up and watch!" Well, what? We're like a people that come in half dazed. Brethren, there are things in this world all the time that are just looking to put us in a trance. Just make us fall asleep. Pursue money and pursue pleasures. And pursue t.v.'s and pursue cars. Pursue new dishes... You know the

air conditioner doesn't work. Brethren, life comes at us and if we're not careful, we just get swept away. All the anxieties we heard about, the cares of this world. And we're floated away and we just kind of fall back in half slumber. And somebody says, "Wake up! And watch!" And it's like, what? There's a war! And we hardly know, half way back and forth, what? Is the dream the reality? Or is the war the reality?

And I'll tell you this American life... You know what Kenny Lee told me on Wednesday? That [name redacted] told him after watching all the battles over in Lebanon, he said, this is how Christianity really is. In other words, what? Christianity here isn't the way it really is? No, brethren, Christianity here is the way it really is too. But what they're faced with over there tends to keep you on your toes. The danger here is all this stuff. All the money. All the riches. All the sports. Brethren, there are places in the world - sports? I mean, is [he] really thinking about who is going to go to the Super Bowl this year? You probably don't think a whole lot about that when you're on the verge of getting tossed out of the country all the time and you've got Muslims that you hear through the grapevine are planning to kill you. And there are people perishing all around you. And Syrian refugees who are on the brink of eternity and they're rejecting Christ one after another. It tends to wake you up to realities.

Brethren, this is the danger. What are you talking about war? It's like, sometimes, we just need this wake up call. That's what I felt like bringing the message down there - we need that here too. We need as much as anybody in the world. This wake up call. Startled out of sleep. We tend to get groggy. Brethren, I'll tell you this. When a man's eyes are opened into the spiritual realm, you know what he doesn't see? He doesn't see angels sleeping. You know what he sees? He sees they're vigilant. And they're watching. What were those angels watching for? They weren't watching the horizon just for the sake of exercising their eyeballs. They weren't just casually looking at the mountain ranges and admiring. You know what they were watching the horizons for? They were watching for danger. Undoubtedly, watching for some enemy. Watching. Watching.

We don't know what happens in the angelic realm, and how they fight. But you get glimpses of it in Scripture when you hear the chariots in the top of the trees. I mean, there's angelic warfare. You get glimpses of it in Scripture. In fact, maybe we ought to take some look at this. But brethren, before we move on, notice if you're still there in Matthew 26. Notice what our Lord says in v. 38. "Remain here and watch with Me." I find this amazing. Watch with Me. In other words, I want you to do what I'm doing. Jesus is saying, I'm watching. I brought you three to watch with Me. Not to sleep. To watch with Me.

The reason I find it so amazing is that if you look at the account, is that what it seems like our Lord is doing in the Garden of Gethsemane? Is anything described there seem like He's watching? I find He's suffering, He's bleeding, He's pleading, He's wrestling with His Father in prayer, He falls on His face, He's ministered to by an angel, He reproves His disciples for sleeping. But where is He watching? Notice verse 40. "So could you not watch with Me one hour?" You see, but that's exactly what He says He's doing. He says He's watching. Undoubtedly, verse 41 is the key, is it not? "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation." That's what He was doing. His prayers. His prayers - that's where the watching... it's how He prayed. That's where the watching is. It's not that He stood in the garden and gazed

off in the distance and in the horizon, watching for the torches of the people coming who would arrest Him. That's not how He watched. Watch and pray. Scripture everywhere confirms this.

Listen to this. Don't turn there, but listen to this. Luke 21:36 "Stay awake at all times praying." Or we saw in Ephesians 6:18, "Praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert." Or as we saw in Colossians 4:2, "Continue steadfastly in prayer." Or "devote yourself to prayer, being watchful in it." Being vigilant in it. Watchful. Watchful. We must be alert and stay awake.

Brethren, the way you put all this together... how do they fit together? Brethren, I believe that the way that they fit together is this: It's not so much that as we pray, God wakes us up. I think the issue is that we need to be reminded of the warfare. We need to be reminded of the reality. And with that reality in mind, we then go to prayer. And our prayers will reflect the reality of the situation. You see, we can pray without watching. In other words, we forget. You're just kind of living your life. Single people... all you pray about is getting a wife or getting a husband. You just go through life, just give me, give me, give me. I don't have this. I don't have that. Lord, my knee hurts. Would you heal it? And you see, that's just being asleep. Listen to me. You know this is true.

Last night, as I was going to bed. I just brought up a 14 minute YouTube clip on tank warfare. Our Sherman tank against the German Tiger. They actually had footage of these tanks being blown up and guys crawling out. At least, the guys that were alive crawling out. I'll tell you what, one American climbed out of a Sherman tank after it was hit, and his left leg was blown off, and he was moving. His leg was gone. Those people lay there. He was moving. He got out of that tank, and with one leg, he was getting away from there as fast as he could. It's very interesting when you watch people who are truly in war. They act different than people at peacetime. They're awake. You typically don't fall asleep in a Sherman tank when you've got the Panthers or the Tigers of the Germans. They tended to be a lot better equipped. You know what it's like when people are in war? You know what it's like. You know what? Listen, brethren, if we're at wartime and there's an enemy in the land, and there's a reality that they may come through this door at any time, you know what? You tend to stay armed. You tend to stay wary. You tend to watch. You're looking. Might they break in here? Might my family come under fire? When you're in a foxhole, and the enemy's on the move... When you're in a Sherman tank, and you know there are big Tiger German tanks out there waiting for you, hiding in the hedge rows. You know what? You tend to keep your eyes open and those tank drivers for our Sherman's said they were watching. Brethren, one of those guys said, "We saw a shape. We shot. And we blew up a farmer's outhouse. Because it had the shape of a tank." They weren't taking any chances. They were watching. They were watching for just the silhouette in the tree line. Because those big tanks, if they got the first shot off, you were dead if you were in a Sherman.

Brethren, this is how it is when people are at war. I'll tell you when planes are roaring overhead and the great big artillery is booming and men are dying, you're alert. You want to stay armed. And men are desperate. And I'll tell you what, they pray. And their prayers are different than the guy that's sitting at home with his feet kicked up. Cold beer in his hand watching pre-season football. Out there around our city. If there's any prayer on his lips at all. Oh God, please let the Cowboys win. If you think that's foolish, there are people that pray that. I remember one time hearing when the Spurs were in the playoffs, we visited the nuns over here.

We were trying to bring the Gospel to them. And they were talking about praying for the Spurs to win. People pray that way. But when you're in a foxhole you pray different. When you're in a Sherman tank in World War II, and the enemy is out there, you pray different. And there is an intensity and there is an alertness, and there's a readiness, and there is an awakensness. Brethren, men are on guard when it's wartime. Men are desperate. They're alert.

But you know what? When you suppose there's no war, when you think it's peacetime, what do you do? You relax. You let your guard down. You do that in war, you end up dead. Brethren, our Lord calls us to watch. And you know the way that we're going to enter into our prayer meetings and enter into our prayer closets with this watchfulness? It's to be reminded of the reality. And so I want to remind you. Revelation 12 is a great reminder. Go there. I want you to see these verses for yourself. Brethren, men loosen up when they think the war is past. But what we need to recognize is Scripture tells us under no uncertain terms that the war is not past. We are in the midst of it. If we only have eyes to see it.

What would we see if our eyes were opened to see into the spiritual realm? You have a good idea from Scripture what we would see. But I want to remind you. I want to show you from Scripture what the reality is, even if your eyeballs can't see it. Revelation 12 We're not going to deal with every single verse here. We're just going to flow through here. But I want you to see it. Revelation 12:9 "The great dragon was thrown down. That ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. He was thrown down to the earth. And his angels were thrown down with him." And brethren, the primary thing that I want you to see there is he is thrown down: here. He is thrown down to this earth. He is thrown down to the very place where we are. Brethren, watch for your adversary the devil prowls about like a roaring lion to seek whom he may devour. You see, he's here.

You need to watch. Brethren, I'll tell you, those angels don't fall asleep and they were watching. We don't want to be like these disciples in the garden. Brethren, that you not fall into temptation. That's what He told them. Why? Because there's a tempter. And he's there. And I'll tell you what he was tempting Christ Himself. Don't go to the cross. Don't do this. And you feel it. Jesus saying, "Father, if it's possible, please spare Me from this." But! But! In His prayers, "I'm committed to Your will." But He recognized the battle. And He comes to these sleeping. "Why could you not watch and pray?" "Could you not for one hour, Peter?"

And so often, we're just like them. Brethren, notice verse 12. "But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath because he knows that his time is short." Brethren, his wrath is intense. I don't know how much time we've got, but you know what, for him, however much time it is, it's short. Brethren, he doesn't sleep. You may. He does not. He is active all the time.

And brethren, notice verse 17. This verse here, Oh, brothers and sisters, may this sink into your thinking. "Then the dragon became furious with the woman." Now, what's very interesting here is that the woman gives birth to a child. You know if you go all the way back to Genesis 3, you see that there would be an offspring of the woman. This is symbolism here. The Christ comes forth from this woman. But you know what? This woman also gives birth to more offspring. Notice this. The rest of her offspring. "The dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring." Brethren, you can get all hung up on the symbolism. Well, who's the woman and who's the offspring? He defines it for us here. "Those

who keep the commandments of God." You know what Jesus said, it's not everybody that says, "Lord, Lord," but those who do the will of My Father. These are Christians here. If you say that you know Him, and you don't keep His commandments, you're liars and the truth is not in you. You see, these are the people who keep His commandments. His Word abides in them. "and they hold to the testimony of Jesus." "And he stood on the sand of the sea." Oh brethren, the symbolism, the sea - so often a picture of all the nations. The unrest. The peoples. Isn't that exactly what Scripture says? The whole world lies in the power of the evil one. He stands there on top of it.

But here's what I want you to notice. He is furious. His time is short. And he makes war, very specifically, on those who hold to the testimony of Jesus Christ. Brethren, as I was explaining to the brethren in Nicaragua. You get these great big spinning storms in the Gulf of Mexico. This is hurricane season. A hurricane comes. Katrina. Freddie Garza and I went over there after the storm. You know what was interesting? We went there to the coast of Mississippi, near Mobile where those two states come together at the Gulf. We were in that area. And you know what you saw? Everything wiped out. Houses wiped out. Trees wiped out. Just big piles... it wiped out everything. When people came in after the storm, everything was wiped out. Everything was destroyed. That's how storms are.

And here comes Satan. And what I want you to know is this, he's not indiscriminate like a storm. He's already got his foot on the sea. The whole world is in the power of the evil one. You know who in this world is not in his power? The very ones that he is making war against. His power does not indiscriminately destroy. He means to very particularly focus his energies. And his wrath is furious. Brethren, you just wake up to this reality. He is at war with us. He is at war with the people of God. Jesus is saying stay awake and pray. There's reason here.

Brethren, go back to Ephesians 6. Let's just build the picture. It's time for you and me to wake up to this reality. Brethren, we need to be reminded of the reality. You're going to go out of this place. You go out and you get in your car. You go and you drive home. You're going to have dinner. Or you eat here and then you get in your car and go home and go on with life. And you go out in the world this week, and you're going on. You come home to your family. You may have your daily devotions, but brethren, what I'm telling you, is what Scripture is saying is this, is when you pray, brethren, when you pray; mothers, fathers, singles, children, when you pray, you are to pray with this in mind. How are you going to be alert and watchful? Brethren, it's when you go to your knees and you're gripped by this reality. That there is an enemy. And his rage is directed at you. And see, when you're aware of this and you recognize that there is this cosmic battle that is taking place, and you're gripped by that reality. Then, you come to pray and your prayers are watchful. Your prayers are alert. In other words, you're praying with a mind that is awake to these realities. So you're not just praying about ridiculous things and things that don't matter. That the Cowboys would win. It's not about all that. It's about the realities of this warfare. It's like the man in the foxhole. The man in the Sherman tank. You're desperate. There are things happening. You know they're happening. You may not see them with your physical eyes, and you may not ever have your eyes opened like they were with this brother that traveled to the Middle East or like it was with Elisha. But the reality is, you know it's happening around you whether you can see it or not.

Brethren, look at this text. Ephesians 6:10 You know this. This is about the armor of God. "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities..." Brethren, are you getting this? "That you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil." The devil. How much intelligence do you think he has? How much wisdom do you think he has? Now, I know he does things that are foolish because they're against God, and he can never utterly win this battle. I recognize that.

But look who we're dealing with. Very often, we consider that very likely the devil is the greatest created being that God ever made. Think of his intelligence. He schemes. Think of his focus. It's on you, Christian. And you see it here. He's got a whole hierarchy. "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers..." Plural. There's many of them. And look, the rulers aren't the ground soldiers. The rulers are the top echelon of this hierarchy. There are rulers. Great spiritual fallen angelic rulers. He's the prince of the power of the air. This area of this earth moving about. Where were you, Satan? He's walking to and fro. And what's he doing? He's watching for people just like Job and anybody like him. He's looking. He's looking for opportunity. Authorities, cosmic powers, over the present darkness. Against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Brethren, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. Again, he's speaking to Christians. We're the ones wrestling. The world doesn't wrestle. The world's in his power. The world's gladly being carried along by him. He's just deceiving them. And they love a lie and they love to be deceived. They're all happy with that. They're moving along.

Brethren, we're the only ones going upstream. And he recognizes it. You remember how it was in Pilgrim's Progress? Here's one who gets on the Master's highway. And Apollyon came out. Brethren, specifically to oppose Christian. And he says so. Now, I know man dreamt up that allegory, but that's right on target. Right on target. You see the reality here. Cosmic powers over this present darkness. Brethren, you have to recognize, this is who we're wrestling against. This is where the battle is: cosmic powers, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. The "we" here is Christians. We're the ones in combat against these powers of this present darkness. We fight angels. And they have schemes.

And brethren, the thing is, we desperately need, we desperately are in a place that we've got to have God; we've got to have His help; we've got to have Him. We're facing somebody who's far stronger than us. Brethren, you know what Scripture says. What? There's a parable. Casting seed. The seed falls, and birds come and carry the seed away. What is that? Jesus tells us that's the devil. Have you ever read very specifically what it says? He takes away the seed that they might not believe and be saved. You know, you could just read that. Do you recognize what that's saying? He doesn't want people saved. He wants them damned. You have an enemy. The ancient, the old serpent. Do you know what that means? He's been around a long time. He killed our first parents.

You remember this. Father of lies. A murderer from the beginning. He murdered our first parents. How does he do it? He does it through deception. And guess what? His whole will in all of his fury is turned against the church. Those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus Christ. And if there isn't reason for you to be alert and watchful when you go to God in prayer, you need to listen to what this is saying. This enemy shows no mercy. You

know what? The truth is there's all sorts of stories about the Germans showing mercy to our soldiers. And our soldiers showing mercy to them. There's even cases of the Japanese showing mercy. This enemy shows none. You need to recognize this. He wants to damn your children. And he wants to damn your parents. And he wants to damn you. And he wants this whole city of San Antonio destroyed.

And I'm talking the people. He doesn't care about the houses. You read in Scripture, leave the grass alone, leave the trees alone. You see, it's not indiscriminate. He doesn't wipe out the forests. He means to damn humanity. And he is plying all of his schemes and all of his will in that direction. And if you don't believe there isn't reason to sit up, brethren, and wake up and be alert when we go to God in prayer, brethren, we are dealing with demonic strongholds that mean to wreck and ruin and destroy and damn. That is what the devil is about. He's not playing here. And he doesn't sleep. And his time is short. And his rage is furious. And it's aimed at you.

Brethren, don't wonder at the fact that you all of a sudden look up one day and you see your children being sucked away. He's watching. Brethren, if we had eyes to see, he's infiltrated our families, he's infiltrated our workplaces, our colleges, he is all around us. And brethren, if we had eyes to see, and we could see into the spiritual realm, based on that parable of the soils, you know as well as I do, he's infiltrated this church. And he's seeking even now, if we could see it. Brethren, there's a cosmic battle. And this is where we wrestle. This is where we fight. You see, prayer; being alert in prayer; being alert in the same or watching in the same, brethren, it's in the context of war. It's in the context of spiritual armor. It's in the context of this wrestling against these cosmic forces of evil in the heavenly places. This is reality. This is not time to sleep.

Brethren, we must not sleep. You notice what the text says. "That we may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil." What are schemes? It's his plans. You read in 2 Corinthians 2:11 that we would not be outwitted by Satan, for we're not ignorant of his designs. Schemes. Designs. Do you recognize that even as we speak he is designing? He is scheming. To do what? To destroy us. He wants to split the church. He wants the leaders here to fall into sin. We've been praying for our children. He doesn't want them saved, and he doesn't want you praying for them. He wants to stifle the prayer meeting. He wants to destroy our fasting. He wants to corrupt our Gospel. He wants to bring false teachers in here. Brethren, he wants to damn us. And if we're already saved, and he can't unsave us, he wants us powerless.

Brethren, this is the reality. This is it. He has designs. He has schemes. He's at war against us. He desires to wreck. He's merciless. He's cruel. Brethren, he would see you in the flames of hell and take delight in it. He would delight if your parents that are lost perished in hell right now. He would delight in that. He takes joy in watching people on their deathbed with no hope. He takes joy in people who have rejected the cross and have rejected following Christ to chase after the fleeting allurements of this world. That they might have their sin for a season. Oh, he dangles it out there. Come have it. This sex looks good. This money - it's great. All the pleasures. All the fun. You want to travel. You want to see the world. Come on. Life is short.

Flying back from Nicaragua, I was next to a young lady who's working on her third Master's degree. Why? Because she just loves being in college. 33 years old. Brethren, that's the world. They're the ones asleep. Brethren, God forbid that should be us! Of course, they're

sleeping. Chasing their money. That's the dream world. And I'll tell you, God has assigned us to live our lives in America and it may not be Lebanon... I'll tell you, there may be some advantages to Lebanon. Those things that we read about with our sister. Why? Because it keeps you on your toes. Brethren, you read in Pilgrim's Progress, about the enchanted land. That's where we're at. Everything around us just meant to put us to sleep. All the computer stuff. All the technology. All the stuff. Oh, brethren, have you ever thought about all the stuff? All the stuff? It's just meant to lull us to sleep. Lull us to sleep. There is no battle... just go to sleep. Go to sleep. Go to sleep...

Brethren, he's the father of lies. And there is a war. He'll murder your family if you give him the chance. I hope some of you found something wrong with that statement. Here's the problem, brethren. You can't withstand him. Only God can withstand him. That's where the prayers come in. That's where the desperation comes in. Brethren, he'll murder your families unless God prevents it. And the thing is that we're told that if you ask, you will receive. If you seek, you'll find. If you knock, it shall be opened unto you. We're told that you don't have because you haven't asked. Brethren, we're talking about all sorts of things that God has designed us to pray for. Satan doesn't want you praying. Because he knows that when you pray, you go to fetch power against him. And he wants to shut it down. Oh, prayerless churches - he loves that. Because prayerless churches aren't watching. Brethren, when you get desperate... when you get to where you recognize the intensity of this battle, you go to God. You go to prayer. You get on your knees.

Why? Because you're desperate. Because you recognize you're going to be defeated unless God comes through for you. Brethren, how many of us have gotten to the place? I felt this, I know many of you feel this. I felt this so much with my son. Just helpless! Helpless! Dead in the water. All I could do was plead with the Lord. Because I knew I didn't have the power to do something. Satan is there drawing, drawing away, luring away, and what can you do? You're not strong enough. You know what? When the kids are little, you can restrict them physically. But you know what? As they grow up, there's all these allurements being dangled in front of them with that hook inside. And he's calling them. And in their fallenness and his experience, he's experienced right from our first parents.

And you know what? He's been successful every single time. Except once. There was One Who came. And I'll tell you, it's Him we need. Brethren, he doesn't fear us. Not by ourselves. So often, we can get this idea, oh, we've got Calvinistic doctrine, we believe in the sovereignty of God. He chews that up and spits that out. Our reformed faith does not terrify him. You go in Scripture and you can see what terrifies him. You ever notice anything in the New Testament that terrified the demons? I find only one thing. Don't you? God manifest in the flesh. That got their attention. "Don't throw us in the pit before our time!!" You see, a lot of people have this idea, like two boxers going back and forth. God and the devil. It's not like that at all. Those demons aren't even contemplating a fight. They're just trying to survive. That's how it is. That's Who we need. But He's the very one that said, "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it."

I think there is a great alertness to the prayers here on Wednesday. You know how you can tell when we stop being alert to the realities? When prayer meetings are all about this ache, this pain, grandma's cough... I know as a pastor at this church that when I hear the prayer meetings start going in the direction of just health issues, I recognize we're falling asleep. That

doesn't mean we can't pray for those things. It doesn't mean it isn't appropriate to pray for everything. And all things. But I can tell this, when we gather together, brethren, there should be a militancy about those prayers. There should be the smell of war on those prayers. There should be an alertness to these realities, against whom we wrestle, and against the fact that he is furious, and there are schemes and there are designs. Brethren, when the church is praying for our love; praying for our humility; praying for our unity; praying for the purity of doctrine; praying that our prayer meetings would continue to be attended; that people would have the spirit of prayer upon them, and that people would continue to be given to fasting and we're praying for the expanse of the Kingdom of Christ and that His Kingdom would come, and we're praying for the Gospel, and we're praying for souls, and we're praying for children. Brethren, then there's a militancy. Then there's an alertness. Then we're awake to the realities. Because this is the reality. This is what we need to wake up to, and we must not be ignorant. This is no time to walk around with our heads in the cloud or like the proverbial ostrich with its head buried in the sand.

Brethren, lift up your eyes and look! And what are you going to see if you look with spiritual eyes? With biblical eyes? I'll tell you what you're going to see. You're going to see movement. Spiritual kingdoms are moving. Christ is going forth conquering and to conquer. And the nations are in darkness. And we have been given the Gospel; we have been given the power of God unto salvation; we've been given this seed of the Word of God abiding, living... that is how men are born again. And we have a commission. And it's to go forth. And Christ says He'll be with us.

Brethren, that's what we need! What do we need? We need to pray for God to come. Because the thing that Satan fears - it's the power of God. And when God shows up, Satan is in trouble. And you know what we as a church are in trouble until God shows up. If He shows up - that's where the victory is had. Christ. We need Him among us. He promised to be among us. He promised not to leave us or forsake us. He promised that until the end of the age He would be with us. That is our hope. And we cling to Him. And brethren, that's what Satan fears. He fears when we're desperate in prayer. He fears when you're out there on the streets and you're proclaiming the Gospel. And then you come and get on your knees, because you realize you don't have the power. Only He can empower that Gospel. And you recognize you desperately need Him. Lord, we need You to save our children. If you don't save them, they won't be saved. And we need You to save our neighbors, and our co-workers, and our fellow students. If You don't save them, they won't be saved. Lord, we need Your help! We need Your help in this church. Like Whitefield prayed, "Lord, if you see me becoming too comfortable, put a thorn in my nest."

One of the things that we need to be desperately praying for is that God would put those thorns. You know what, this suffering our brother was talking about in the first hour, don't look at that as being a negative thing. Oh, it's tough. But don't look at it as being a negative thing. Because suffering and trials and all those sorts of things, and the persecution. Brethren, that's what keeps us on our toes. That's what keeps us desperate. That's what keeps us on our knees. It's when everything becomes soft. Soft. And what happens? We forget. We're a people that are so forgetful. How often in Scripture? Remember, remember... do this in remembrance... There's remembering - why? We're forgetful. Why do we have to come back to this book every time?

Have you not all read it cover to cover? Many of you have. Why do I need to preach on it again? Haven't you read it already? Why is it preaching every week? Why do we need the Lord's Supper again and again and again? Because, brethren, we forget where the power is and we forget the truths of this Word. We need to go back to it. We need to be reminded.

Brethren, I'm here today to remind you. We're in a battle. And there are schemes of the devil. To call you to battle. To watching and prayer. Don't walk around in this fantasy. It's the world out there. They live in the fantasy. Their world is all about, yes, the upcoming football season or college starts, or whatever - We're coming into the fall. Hopefully, it will be a cool fall and it will be rainy. Why? And the gardens will grow and the fields... Brethren, we live in this world, and I know that those are realities around us, but brethren, those aren't the primary realities. And we need to wake up to this. I know we need to have cars and get back and forth, and I know air conditioning's nice in this place. And I know there are things. There are things: phones and communication and computers. And they become part of our lives. And we've got to go off to work. And I know, but brethren, wake up in the midst of it. Don't fall asleep. Don't think money is the end of everything. Don't think retirement is the end of everything.

Brethren, we are in a war. We are in a war, and this is a war for souls and this is a war that's for keeps. And I'll tell you, if your children lose their soul, it's forever. If your parents lose their soul, it's forever. If you lose your soul, it's forever. There's an enemy. Merciless. He wants to destroy you. And I'll tell you, if he can't destroy you, because you're in the palm of the Father's hand, then what he is going to do is he's going to seek to make you powerless. How are you powerless? Don't pray. Don't pray. You're too busy to pray. You're too busy to go to the prayer meeting. Don't you know how hard you worked today? You had to put in some overtime. You're totally justified. Don't go to the prayer meeting tonight. In fact, aren't you one of those guys that believes in the sovereignty of God? Isn't God sovereign? Isn't He going to do everything that He's going to do? Whether you pray or not? You don't need to pray. It doesn't really matter. In the end, it doesn't really make any difference. Just go to sleep, Christian. Prayer doesn't really matter. You're too tired to pray. Other things are more important. Or you know, you can get in the midst of the suffering like our brother was talking about. You know what he comes along and says then? Aw, look how you're suffering... If God really cared about you, you would not be in this situation. And see, work some self pity in there. People full of self pity don't typically run out to the prayer meeting and pray. Or fall on their knees and pray very fervently, watching and alert. Why? Because they're full of self pity. I'm not going to pray. If God's going to treat me like this, then I'm going to sit down and watch the John Wayne movie. Or whatever it is you do. And the devil will be right there. Seeking. Shut it down. Shut it down.

Brethren, I'll tell you this. God never says that prayer doesn't matter. It's only the devil that will tell you that. Have you ever noticed? Brethren, you look at the New Testament, you go to every one of those epistles Paul wrote to those churches. I doubt you can find one of those that does not in some way or another call that church to prayer. Whether it's the Thessalonians, the Romans, the Colossians, the Ephesians, the Philippians... Pray without ceasing. Be constant in prayer. Continue steadfastly in prayer. Pray at all times in the Spirit. In everything with prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. Christian, I'll tell you one thing you cannot do with those verses. You cannot come away saying prayer doesn't matter. Not when you've been called that way. You can't say prayer isn't that

important. You can't say prayer's optional, or that it's insignificant. You simply cannot do that from these verses. Men ought always to pray and not lose heart. Or not faint. Stay awake at all times praying. May God help us, brethren. When we fail to pray as we ought, it's not because we can't pray. It's not because there aren't things to pray for. It's not because we haven't been bidden to pray. We have been bidden to pray. We should pray. We're called to pray. We must pray. We must not faint in prayer. We must keep awake in prayer.

Why? Because this battle is ever so real and there's only one thing that terrifies the devil. And that's when God shows up. Brethren, we need to pray, because we need God. We need to pray, because we need to lay hold on Him. We need Him to come down. We need Him here. We need Him showing up. Brethren, when He comes, all He's got to do is give the word and the demons are cleared. And people will fall under conviction. All He's got to do is give the word and our children will be swept into the Kingdom of Christ. All He's got to do is show up, and San Antonio could undergo a massive revival. How often through history has He simply given the word and the darkness flees? The darkness is pushed back. Brethren, we need Him. That's the only thing. It's our spiritual weapons empowered by God that bring down spiritual strongholds. That is what we need. That is what we must have. That is what we must desperately ask Him for. I'll tell you what the devil fears. The devil fears when the prayer meetings are full. And when there's tears coming down people's faces. And there's an urgency. And there's desperation. And we're laying hold. Because we know, if He doesn't show up... we're not casual, we're not lax, our feet aren't kicked up, it's not just these cold, dead prayers. It's when we really grab hold on the Lord and we won't let Him go, and we're like Jacob with the Angel of the Lord. He can shake us. He can take us out of joint. We're not letting go. He may bring suffering. We're not letting go. Why? We need Him. We need the blessing from Him. We don't give up.

We recognize, brethren, we recognize. That's what this is all about. And it's those who hold to the testimony. And you're the objects of the battle. You're the objects. He's an angel. Maybe the greatest being ever created. And he's got a third of the angels if we understand our Bibles correctly from this chapter. A third of the stars swept by his tail. And there's rulers and principalities and powers, and they're aligned, and they're arranged, and they're scheming and they're designing. And their designs are to destroy us. That ought to wake us up. If you knew there was a great enemy in the land, the most powerful upon the face of the earth, and it was coming for us, and it meant to destroy us, and kill our families, and kill our friends, you would be on the alert.

But it is a greater reality than any kind of physical enemy. It is a greater reality. Because what's at stake here is eternal. It is souls. And if a soul is lost, it's lost for good. And you say, God is sovereign, can it all really matter? You better believe it matters. Why would Christ be saying, Stay awake. Stay awake. Peter, James, John... aren't they elect? Isn't God going to save who He's going to save? Isn't Jesus going to be successful at the cross? I mean, why? Why does it all matter? Why is it all important? Because this is the way God designed it to be. And it is those who do desperately cling to Him. Brethren, he fears this, and when he sees a church and they're desperate in their prayers and they're weeping over souls, and they're out there and they're holding the cross up before this fallen world, and they come back again to their knees, and they're praying and they're fasting.

Brethren, you know this about prayer too. If you have faith, you'll ask what you will. Or those who are doing righteousness and keeping His commandments, if His Word abides in you, you shall ask what you will and it shall be done unto you. Those who give themselves to trusting the Lord and clinging to Him and to His promises, and seek to walk in righteousness. Oh, the effectual, fervent prayers of a righteous man... let that sink into your ears. It's true that when we fall, the blood bids us still to enter. It's true there's forgiveness. It's true even on your worst day, you've got access and you can boldly approach. But I'll tell you, you know this from Scripture, righteousness... Righteousness, faith... those are so essential to powerful prayer. When Satan sees that, he fears that, because he fears God and he knows where people like that pray, God shows up and God comes and God helps. And you know how he knows that? Because God has promised it. We need to know that too. We need to be awake to that reality as well.

You can have all the right doctrine. You can have a church building. You can figure out exactly, as a Christian, how should I school my children? As a Christian, how should I dress? As a Christian, what should I do with the t.v.? Or, I'm not going to watch an R-rated movie. That is not what he fears. Not that there isn't a place to figure out those things. Not that there isn't a place for those things in the way of righteousness and faith. But the things that cause him to tremble... the things that put us on his radar... it's not to have a fancy building, and it's not to have large numbers, and it's not to have large collections coming in to the offering box. That isn't what causes the kingdom of darkness to tremble. It's when God comes down. He can't resist it. It's all over. We need the Lord. We need the Lord.

Brethren, this message is just a reminder. There's a cosmic battle. You may fall asleep, but that doesn't take you out of the battle. You are an object of his wrath and fury no matter if you're asleep or awake. You can't go hide in the corner. You can't go home and bar up the windows. Put the bars up around your house like some people do here. And keep him out. Because he's going to come in. You can throw the t.v. away. He's going to come in. Throw everything away but Little House on the Prairie, he's coming in. Be alert when you pray. Be watchful. Go to your knees with this mindset. Be desperate. Be militant. Be wary. Be alert. This is how we must fight this battle. There's a lot of other armor there, I recognize. But all prayer. All prayer. Being alert in it. Watching in the same. Remember what Jesus says there in Mark 13. What I say to you, I say to all. Watch. Father, press us with this reality. Make us a watchful church. Make us a dangerous church. Make us a threat to the kingdom of darkness. Lord, help us for the sake of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.