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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH  
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA  
NOVEMBER 18, 2007  
PASTOR MIKE BREEN

1 PASTOR WENDA FRY: Would you give a warm Bethany  
2 welcome to Mike Breen.

3 (Applause)

4 MR. BREEN: Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank  
5 you very much, Wenda.

6 I see that you're leaving the building as I'm  
7 beginning to preach. That's not necessarily a good sign.

8 And thanks to Mark as well for his gracious  
9 hospitality, along with Wenda this week.

10 It's always a pleasure to come here. I have had a  
11 tremendous week.

12 I've really enjoyed speaking to the various  
13 different groups and age groups and getting to know the staff  
14 more, bringing along my colleague this week, Steve Cochran,  
15 who has been with me up until yesterday, helping with various  
16 different things and we've really enjoyed our time here.

17 What I'm going to do today is I'm going to share  
18 with you something of my reflection as I and my family seek  
19 and prepare to become permanent residents here.

20 It's a long and somewhat tedious business gaining  
21 permanent residency in the United States.

22 And in some ways I'm grateful for that, because, of  
23 course, it gives you a sense of it being all the more  
24 worthwhile.

25 But being something of a history buff, a person who

1 is drawn towards history, what I've done as I've considered  
2 that is I've looked at the history of these great states, of  
3 this great nation, and reflected a little on what it is that  
4 God is doing here in this land.

5           What is it that God has done in this land, and what  
6 is it that God wants to do in the future?

7           My firm belief is this; that God is stirring in the  
8 heart of his people and is bringing about spiritual revival  
9 and renewal for his church and for this nation that it might  
10 touch the world.

11           What I've noticed in the history of revival here in  
12 this land, as it has worked through the various different  
13 denominations and streams, as it has come through the  
14 different decades and centuries of this nation's life, is  
15 that, unlike any other nation on earth, revival here in this  
16 land is called an awakening.

17           It's called an awakening.

18           It's described in terms of the Lord Jesus calling  
19 his church to wake up from slumber, and as those awakenings  
20 have taken place, it's quite clear now with hindsight, which  
21 of course is 20/20, with hindsight we can see that God  
22 stirred in his church an awakening that prepared the nation  
23 for great days of trial.

24           The first great awakening was in the middle of the  
25 18th Century, around about 1730 through the 1740s, the Lord

1 began stirring in the heart of the people of this nation.

2 Most of them, of course, lived on the eastern sea  
3 board.

4 There in a little town called North Hampton, under  
5 the preaching of a great pastor called Jonathan Edwards, who  
6 still to this day is the greatest of American philosophers,  
7 God began to do, in the words of Jonathan Edwards, a  
8 surprising work.

9 He began to stir his people, and from that fire  
10 flames began to spread throughout the whole nation, lit in  
11 every state and city, often under the preaching of an  
12 Englishman called George Whitfield.

13 And God prepared his church and all of the people of  
14 this nation for the War of Independence, when you got free of  
15 people like me.

16 In the middle of the 19th Century, around about the  
17 1840s, the time when it began to peter out, but it had kind  
18 of begun at the beginning of the 19th century, the second  
19 great awakening.

20 God began to call his people to wake up. God began  
21 to do a stirring in the nation.

22 And as he stirred in the mainline denominations, the  
23 Presbyterians and the Methodists, the Lutherans and the  
24 Anglicans, he called them to come to camp meetings.

25 And still to this day the summer camp is riven deep

1 into the culture of this nation because of that time.

2 And then there was the Civil War, when the nation  
3 came into the crucible of conflict and was born again.

4 Other awakenings have emerged, perhaps not to such a  
5 great extent, though they have had remarkable effects around  
6 the world.

7 At the beginning of the 20th Century in a little  
8 shack on Azuza Street in Los Angeles the Pentecostal revival  
9 began.

10 And though we're not part of that stream or  
11 denomination, we must remember that under God's gracious hand  
12 this work has touched more people around the world than any  
13 other single movement of humanity since the world began.

14 And what of these days? Let me read to you the  
15 passage that I've decided to preach on today.

16 It's from Revelation, Chapter 3, and it is the  
17 letter to Sardis, the letter to the church in Sardis, which  
18 was a city in what is today Turkey and then was called Asia  
19 Minor.

20 It is a postcard from the Lord Jesus Christ. You'll  
21 remember that the last book of the Bible is dictated to John  
22 the Apostle by the risen Lord Jesus who meets him when he's  
23 in prison.

24 John is on the prison island of Patmos. It's a  
25 Sunday.

1           He's praying, he's in the spirit, and Jesus comes to  
2 him and gives him the final revelation of scripture.

3           And within that final revelation of scripture there  
4 is a letter to each of the churches that John oversaw, and  
5 one of those churches is Sardis. Listen to these words.

6           "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These  
7 are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and  
8 the seven stars.

9           "I know your deeds. You have a reputation for being  
10 alive, but you are dead. Wake up.

11           "Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I  
12 have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.

13           "Remember therefore what you have received and  
14 heard. Obey it and repent.

15           "But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief  
16 and you will not know at what time I come to you.

17           "Yet, you have a few people in Sardis who have not  
18 soiled their clothes. They will walk with me dressed in  
19 white, for they are worthy.

20           "He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in  
21 white.

22           "I will never blot out his name from the Book of  
23 Life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his  
24 angels.

25           "He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit

1 says to the churches."

2 Jesus comes to the church in Sardis and says wake  
3 up.

4 Now, why did he use that expression to this  
5 particular church?

6 There are seven churches that are addressed in the  
7 Book of Revelation, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira,  
8 Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea.

9 Each of them has a particular message. Only two of  
10 them have unequivocal praise.

11 Most of them have both praise and challenge.

12 This is one of those churches and the challenge to  
13 this church is to wake up.

14 Why was Sardis called to wake up? Well, you see,  
15 Sardis had a particular history.

16 The city had a particular place within that region,  
17 an illustrious past.

18 But within that history there was a particular  
19 problem.

20 The city had often been found to be asleep at great  
21 times of need.

22 It's as though Jesus is saying, you know the history  
23 of your city, you know the history of the people in which  
24 you've been planted, and the spirit in that city, the spirit  
25 in the people around you seems to have affected you, infected

1 you with the same slumber and you need to wake up.

2 Let me explain a little more. Sardis, some hundreds  
3 of years before these words were written, was the center of a  
4 great empire called the Lydian Empire.

5 Its kings were fabled as the richest men in the  
6 world.

7 In the south of this land, still to this day, there  
8 is the expression, as rich as Croesus.

9 Maybe you've heard that expression when they refer  
10 to somebody who is incredibly rich. They describe the person  
11 to be as rich as Croesus.

12 That word Croesus is Croesus, who was the king of  
13 Sardis, the richest man the world had ever seen, a  
14 combination of the Sultan of Brunei and Bill Gates.

15 Nobody could rival his wealth or the wealth of his  
16 city. It had become the bank of the world.

17 Sardis in those days, and in the days that Jesus  
18 addresses this church, Sardis was built on an acropolis, on a  
19 plateau.

20 In Arizona we would call them a mesa. It's a  
21 mountain with very steep cliffs, the top is flat, and on top  
22 of the flattop mountain the fortress city of Sardis was built  
23 with vertical walls and incredibly strong fortifications.

24 King Croesus was safe, so he thought, inside his  
25 fortress city. He believed that no one could touch him.

1           He believed that the reason the world's wealth had  
2 come to him was because it was the bank of world. This was a  
3 place that was invulnerable to attack.

4           But there was a young man with great ambitions and  
5 different ideas.

6           His name was Cyrus. He already was king of the  
7 Medes.

8           He had taken the crown from his maternal  
9 grandfather.

10          Cyrus would one day become the greatest man in the  
11 world, sitting at the heart of the greatest empire the world  
12 have ever seen.

13          So great that he is mentioned in scripture as a good  
14 and a great king who releases the Children of Israel to  
15 return to their own land.

16          But at this stage he's just a young whippersnapper.  
17 He has got the crown of the Medes and he wants to bankroll  
18 his ambition and his campaign.

19          And so he goes to the richest place in the world.  
20 He goes to Sardis.

21          And there on the plains where the Meander River  
22 flows through, looking up at the fortress city, Cyrus and his  
23 soldiers look for a way in.

24          King Croesus looked down and was absolutely  
25 convinced that they could never get in to attack him.

1           With some degree of frustration, Cyrus sends some of  
2 his officers and they look around.

3           They do a reconnoissance trip and they come back  
4 with this simple report.

5           There is no way in, except for one possibility.  
6 There is a crack in the cliff on one side of the mountain.

7           The kind of crack that today would be called by  
8 mountaineers a chimney.

9           The officers postulated that if well-trained and  
10 determined men climbed that chimney, they might be able to  
11 get to the top of the mountain.

12           Then they may be able, under cover of night, to  
13 scale the walls.

14           And then maybe they'll be able to fight their way  
15 from the walls to the gates.

16           And then maybe they will be able to open the gates and  
17 let the army in.

18           It seemed an incredible long shot, but Cyrus had no  
19 other plans, so he said let's do it.

20           The year is 540 BC. Cyrus gathers the first special  
21 forces team in history.

22           He prepares them. He equips them. He sends them  
23 out.

24           They climb the chimney. They get to the top of the  
25 cliffs.

1 Under cover of darkness they scale the walls and  
2 when they get to the top of the walls, incredible though it  
3 might seem, the city was asleep.

4 The complacency of the king had spread to his  
5 people, so even the guards on the walls were asleep.

6 The guards were dead before they were awake and the  
7 city fell to a small team of soldiers.

8 The fabled treasures of King Croesus came into the  
9 hands of Cyrus.

10 Everyone remembers Cyrus; but everyone forgets  
11 Croesus.

12 Jesus says to the church in Sardis, wake up.  
13 Strengthen what remains.

14 Now you would think that a city with that kind of  
15 history would never make the same mistake again.

16 Let's roll forward the centuries. It's now 214 BC.  
17 Sardis has risen again because of its preeminent position in  
18 the region and its remarkable physical characteristics that  
19 make it a bank for many of the riches of the world to be  
20 stored.

21 And so Sardis has now risen again and has become  
22 great in the eyes of many.

23 There is a young ruler in Syria, Antiochus. He  
24 wants to become the greatest man in the world.

25 He needs to bankroll his ambitions and campaign. He

1 goes to Sardis.

2           The people of Sardis have not read their history,  
3 but Antiochus has.

4           In the middle of night he sends a group of men up  
5 the same chimney, the crack in the cliff.

6           They climb the same walls, and incredible though it  
7 may seem, a city surrounded by a vast army was asleep and it  
8 fell before it was awakened.

9           Wake up, says Jesus.

10           Now, what was it that caused the city to slumber?

11           Well, no doubt its wealth, its riches, and its  
12 success, and its power caused it to be sedated to the  
13 realities of life.

14           There is something about wealth and success that  
15 causes the soul to slumber.

16           It causes the spirit to be sedated and we become  
17 less alert because everything is laid on for us.

18           We become less guarded, because we think that we are  
19 secure.

20           Well, that could never happen anywhere else, could  
21 it?

22           December 7th, 1941, Mitsuo Fuchida was his name, he  
23 was leading a group of bombers across the North Pacific.

24           Ringin in his ears are the words of Admiral  
25 Yamamoto, "We must catch the tiger and her cubs while they

1 sleep."

2 As he dives below cloud cover he breaks radio  
3 silence and in his native tongue he says tiger, tiger, tiger.

4 Tora, tora, tora.

5 More than three thousand American personnel are lost  
6 and the battle for the Pacific has begun.

7 By God's providential hand many of the ships of the  
8 U.S. Pacific Fleet were out on exercise and so the miracle of  
9 Midway six months later was possible.

10 Vice Admiral Nagumo failed to send the second wave  
11 of attack and when Admiral Yamamoto heard that he said this.  
12 "I fear we have awakened a sleeping giant."

13 Is it possible that our wealth, our success, our  
14 power, has sedated our spirit?

15 Is it possible that we, the people of God, could be  
16 asleep, as we find our nation asleep?

17 Is it possible that God could be calling us to  
18 awaken again?

19 Is it possible that in this generation there is a  
20 call for a fresh awakening?

21 Surely a nation like this could not make the same  
22 mistake again.

23 What were you doing on September 11, 2001?

24 Were you prepared? Were you ready? Was the nation  
25 asleep? Were we slumbering in the presence of danger?

1           Could God be saying to us again, it's time to wake  
2 up?

3           Wake up. Strengthen what remains, and if you do not  
4 I will come to you like a thief.

5           What would it look like for the church to be  
6 awakened?

7           Let me give you three ideas.

8           I would suggest that if the church was awakened it  
9 would recognize that there is great deceit, great temptation,  
10 great potential for a sedation in wealth and success.

11           God has blessed this nation like no other in  
12 history.

13           And I pray for our prosperity all the time, but we  
14 need to remember the seductive effects of such great wealth  
15 and power.

16           How would we as individual Christians deal with such  
17 an effect?

18           The answer is simple. Give.

19           It's very simple. We give.

20           We don't garner, we don't hoard to ourselves before  
21 we give to God, because we recognize that all of this has  
22 been provided by his good hand.

23           That in this harvest season it is yet another  
24 harvest from his generosity, and because of his generosity we  
25 return to him our grateful thanks.

1           You know, some people struggle with the whole thing  
2 about giving. Should we give ten percent and all that.

3           Simply put it's this. The reason that ten percent  
4 is in the Bible is because it's just enough to test your  
5 heart.

6           It's just enough to test your heart.

7           Whose money is it?

8           You see, the scriptures say this. It's all God's,  
9 and the way that you represent that in your life is that you  
10 give him the first ten percent, and you say it's yours.

11           And then he says, I have received all that is yours,  
12 now you have all that is mine. That's a good deal.

13           The second thing that we would do is we would guard.  
14 We would come to attention and we would guard the life of the  
15 loved ones around us.

16           We would take the words of Paul to heart. We would  
17 wear the armor of God and we would stand against the  
18 principalities and powers, and having done all that we would  
19 stand, we would guard.

20           Do you recognize that evil creeps through the back  
21 alleys of our cities?

22           Are you aware that that same evil stalks the  
23 corridors of our schools?

24           Who is standing guard? Who prays? Who stands? Is  
25 it you?

1           Are we praying for our children? Are we praying for  
2 the next generation?

3           Are we standing against the darkness? Is there a  
4 guarding? Or are we asleep?

5           Maybe somebody else will do it. Maybe we'll vote  
6 for somebody to do it.

7           Nobody is going to do it except God, so we stand  
8 guard as his representative between heaven and earth and we  
9 call on him.

10          We give, we guard, and finally we go with the  
11 Gospel.

12          Did you know that the destiny of nations has been  
13 placed in your heart because God has given you the Gospel.

14          Are your neighbors going to heaven? Are your work  
15 colleagues those that have bowed the knee to Jesus? Do you  
16 know?

17          Have you gone with the Gospel to those around you?  
18 Not to darkest Africa, but to darkest Elkhorn.

19          I'm going to pray for you in a moment, and I'm going  
20 to pray for myself.

21          And I'm going to ask you to respond, and there are  
22 two kind of responses that I'm going to suggest this morning.

23          The first is a general response and the second is a  
24 particular response.

25          The general response is this. If you hear God

1 saying to you today, wake from slumber. Sleeper, arise.

2 Then as I pray, I invite you to stand.

3 I invite you to bring your spirit to attention.

4 I invite you to say yes to Jesus, that you will be  
5 one of those that gives and guards and goes.

6 If that's not a word for you today, then I would  
7 invite you not to stand.

8 Then, once I have prayed, I'll give you the more  
9 particular response.

10 So as I pray, if God has spoken this word to you  
11 today, then I invite you to stand with me.

12 Heavenly Father, we ask you this day that you would  
13 draw near to us, Lord.

14 That you, Lord, would stir our spirits. That you,  
15 Lord, would strengthen our hearts.

16 That you, Lord, this day, would stir us to gracious  
17 Godly Gospel action.

18 Lord, may we be those who awaken first, so that we  
19 can wake up those around us.

20 We pray, Lord, that this day would be a day of  
21 awakening, a new dawning, a fresh day, a new start.

22 May we, Lord, with commitment join this corps.

23 We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

24 Please stay standing for a moment.

25 When you wake up from sleep, there are a couple of

1 things that happen.

2 You open your eyes and you start to see the needs  
3 around you, so expect that to happen.

4 But another thing happens. As I've been praying for  
5 you this week, I felt as though I ought to share this with  
6 you.

7 Another thing happens when you wake up in the  
8 morning.

9 You find that you're hungry and you're thirsty.  
10 Have you noticed that? That's why we call it breaking the  
11 fast.

12 And it may be that in your heart this day you're  
13 conscious that you are spiritually hungry and spiritually  
14 thirsty for more of God.

15 And if that is you today, these words are for you  
16 from Isaiah 55.

17 "Come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters.  
18 You who have no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and  
19 milk without money and without cost. Come."

20 If that's you today, that you want to say to the  
21 Lord, Lord, I want more of you, I want your spiritual  
22 nourishment, I want your spiritual refreshment so I can take  
23 the bread and the water of life to others, I would like you  
24 to come forward, because I would like to pray for you and  
25 commission you with that word today.

1           Come forward and stand right here. It may not be a  
2 word for everyone, and that's fine.

3           Just allow the Lord to speak to you. As he speaks  
4 to you, just come, hearts open, hands empty.

5           Lord, you say that if we come to you hungry, we will  
6 always be satisfied.

7           You say, Lord, that if we come to you thirsty, we'll  
8 always be refreshed.

9           And so I pray now, Lord, for these dear brothers and  
10 sisters who recognize that in their heart there is a hunger  
11 and thirst for more of you, I pray for them this day and for  
12 myself that, Lord, you would satisfy our hearts; that you  
13 would fill us, Lord, with your presence.

14           That you, Lord, would give us bread enough to eat  
15 and to share with others.

16           Water enough, Lord, to be refreshed and then give to  
17 others.

18           Lord we pray this day that we would go with this  
19 confidence, that you are the bread of life, that you are the  
20 water of life, that we go with you this day to share that  
21 with others.

22           And I pray, Lord, for each of these brothers and  
23 sisters that this week, Lord, they would see the  
24 multiplication of what you're doing in their hearts and the  
25 lives of others.

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We pray this in the good and the strong name of  
Jesus, and all God's people say Amen. God bless you.