

Arise - Opportunity Awaits

Ephesians 5:14-17

Today is the marks of a new year. With it always comes a sense of change, opportunity and uncertainty. In fact, there may be some of us here this morning who have entered this new year with new ideas, things you know you need to work on, or even goals set before you. It is always good to plan, but can we agree this morning that all of these things are useless unless we go before our God and ask him, "God what do you want 2006 to be for me?"

I came across a poem this last week that went like this:

I am the new year.
I am the unspoiled page in your book of time
I am your next chance at the art of living
I am your opportunity to practice what you have learned about life during the last twelve months.
All that you sought and didn't find is hidden in me, waiting for you to search it but with more determination
All the good that you tried for and didn't achieve is mine to grant when you have fewer conflicting desires
All that you dreamed but didn't dare to do, all that you hoped but did not will, all the faith that you claimed but did not have – these slumber lightly, waiting to awakened by the touch of a strong purpose
I am your opportunity to renew your allegiance to Him who said, "Behold, I make all things new."

We have all gone through 2005 – for some it has been a year of growth, for others another challenge to continue to push forward in searching, in achievements, in faith, only to realize that we didn't quite get done all that we wished we could have.

2006 brings with it a sense of opportunity and purpose. How many of us here can agree this morning that this year has a significant sense of meaning and purpose, that as you sit here you can't help but know that God is wanting to do something more in your life personally, in the life of this church corporately, and in the life of this city as a community.

I am convinced, as I have spoken with others, as I have prayed about the coming of 2006, and as I have evaluated what has happened over the last couple of years, that with this year comes a unique sense of purpose and meaning. It is as if we are standing at a doorway only waiting to walk through and into a life of true authentic faith and hope – not a walk of dead works, but of genuine, unquenchable relationship with God - A faith that isn't putting his trust on anything else but purely on the life we have been given through Jesus Christ.

That we would in turn be a place that “Loves God, Reaches People, and who in the midst of living life, experience Hope that allows us to keep pressing through, knowing that God’s will and lessons lay waiting on the others side. I believe that we are on the verge of an awakening where our passions, our desires, our lives are marked with Spirit filled insight, motivation and actions.

As I was praying and studying through what I was going to speak about this New Years I was taken back to our study of the book of Ephesians. Actually, the next part that I was waiting to pick up in a couple of months yet it fits what I think God wants to say to us this morning. **What does God want from us in 2006. Ephesians 5:14-17:**

“Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light.” ¹⁵So be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise. ¹⁶Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. ¹⁷Don’t act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do.

1. A New Awakening (vs. 14)

I think it was fitting that in my message on the “Light” on Christmas Eve, that I had you repeat the following words:

Arise, Shine, for your light has come
For the glory of the Lord has risen
The glory of the Lord has come
The glory of the Lord has risen upon me.

These words, I actually remembered from a worship chorus that we use to sing when I was at the Mojave Foursquare Church. These words are taken out of **Isaiah 60:1:**

¹“Arise, Jerusalem! Let your light shine for all the nations to see! For the glory of the LORD is shining upon you.

That term “arise” here has the idea of “waking up”. It is as if the prophet Isaiah could see that there was a spiritual slumber, apathy, a lack of awareness and that there need to be a spiritual awakening once again. **We need to realize what we have and understand that power that it gives us.**

Now, I am not saying that we have all been asleep, ignorant to the things of God, but can we agree that within all of us, as we have looked back over our Christian walk over the last number of months, that we can identify that God hasn’t had all of our attention, that he hasn’t been the origin of every decision, that we know he has wanted to do more in us than we have allowed him to? We need an re-awakening within us - a fresh pouring out of God upon us. Paul wrote in **1 Thessalonians 5:6-8:**

⁶So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be sober. ⁷Night is the time for sleep and the time when people get drunk. ⁸But let us who live in the

light think clearly, protected by the body armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation.

An awakened spirit is one that is marked by awareness of faith and love, and confidence in the work of Jesus Christ. When Jesus came into our lives there was an awakening of the Spirit. Our spirits that were once consumed with death and hopelessness, were brought to life and an awareness of the realities of God and His Son Jesus Christ.

God's desire and will for our lives is that we would continue to seek him as our true source of life. Does God want to awaken us and breathe new life into us again? Absolutely! In a vision given to Ezekiel in **Ezekiel 37:4-10** we read of God's willingness and ability:

⁴Then he said to me, "Speak to these bones and say, 'Dry bones, listen to the word of the LORD! ⁵This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Look! I am going to breathe into you and make you live again! ⁶I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'" ⁷So I spoke these words, just as he told me. Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as they had been before. ⁸Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, "Speak to the winds and say: 'this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so that they may live again.'" ¹⁰So I spoke as he commanded me, and the wind entered the bodies, and they began to breathe. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army of them.

God can take the most hopeless of circumstances, the most impossible situations, and he can breathe life and hope back into them. **We serve a God who wants to make you spiritually alive, he wants to reach others with this life, and he wants that life to leave a mark on this community and this world.**

I am convinced that the focus of our church over the next year will:

- (1) Be centered on the growth and maturity of current Christians
- (2) The development of spiritual leadership within the staff and LIT's
- (3) The development of tools to help you share the hope and life of Jesus Christ with those who are looking for a new life
- (4) The exposure of our church to our community on a larger scale.

All of these things we will do in an effort to awaken those in the church first so that the world will see our light and be drawn unto the light of Christ. **Romans 6:4** tells us:

⁴For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

The God that we serve is a God of change – he is always doing something new in us. And because of this **Our church needs to be place of change, mirroring the life altering power of the Holy Spirit who loves us just the way we are, yet to much to allow us to remain the same.** One of our goals for the coming year is to bring more awareness to the life altering power of the Word of God.

Here at the church we will:

- (1) be providing classes such as our Hope 101, 202, and 303 classes that aren't just for new followers of Christ but will address the truth of scripture and help develop a plan of continued interaction with the Scriptures
- (2) to develop biblical based opportunities that will be a place of accountability and growth, finding freedom in the teachings of Christ
- (3) Special classes based on relationships, finances, and special topics that will enhance everyday Christian living
- (4) A book club in which we will pick a key book once a quarter and where we will have a gathering at the end of the quarter to discuss the book and talk about what we have learned in the process.

The only thing that will change your life is the constant diet of the Word of God and his Spirit working through the words you read. It will not be based on the ideas of men, it will not be based on whether I am able to motivate you or not, but it is solely based on the Spirit of God putting you through his process in your life. The longer you remain in process the more you will see fruit that will produce a light in you that will draw people unto God. Jesus said in **John 8:12**:

"I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't be stumbling through the darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."

*¹⁴You are the **light** of the world—like a city on a mountain, glowing in the night for all to see. ¹⁵Don't hide your light under a basket! Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine for all. ¹⁶In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. **Matthew 5:14-16***

The only way others are going to see or hear the voice of God is if we are willing to awaken out of our spiritual slumber and become aware - exposing ourselves to all the tools and teachings that will feed our spirit first before we can show or expose others.

The only way that a true awakening can take place in a church or community is if there are believers in that church or community who are willing to come before God first, and who are hungry enough or passionate enough to pursue the things of God no matter what it will require.

We have been given an opportunity – it is not a matter of whether or not God wants to move in our lives or the church, because we know his desire is that we be people who will hunger and thirst for him, we know that he wants to move in our community, we know that his heart is that “all would come to know him and experience him.” The

opportunity is therefore a matter of our response to it. God wants to awaken his church so what are we going to do? God is ready, are we ready? Ephesians 5:14 tells us “awake, and Christ will give you light.” What should be our response? Look at **verse 15-17**:

¹⁵So be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise. ¹⁶Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. ¹⁷Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do.

2. Live with Intention and Purpose (15-17)

Don't just live life as it comes to you, only reacting to what comes your way – allowing your flesh (sinful man) to take over. Instead, live it with purpose and meaning. Make each moment count. **Proverbs 14:8** tells us:

The wise look ahead to see what is coming, but fools deceive themselves.

*⁵Live wisely among those who are not Christians, and make the most of every opportunity. ⁶Let your conversation be gracious and effective so that you will have the right answer for everyone. **Colossians 4:5-6***

Every moment of every day is marked with opportunity. The battle that we find ourselves fighting is in the area of making the right choices. We can live with intention making choices that God can work with and in which God will bless us, or we can choose to fall into the ways of sinful man and find ourselves wandering and lost, without hope, always struggling, knowing that we could have handled it better.

It is when we make right choices that God can and will bless us. It is when we follow what God asks of us that then we will find ourselves producing good fruit and maturing in our faith. With this said, I sense that the **key theme for our church in the year of 2006 is “Give It Up!”**

1. GIVE it up – Finding a place to serve people, to serve our community, and to serve our world. Galatians 6:10 tells us:

¹⁰Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone, especially to our Christian brothers and sisters.

2. Give IT up – There are things or areas in our lives that we need to submit to God. Areas of sin or strongholds, areas that are in question, areas that we have become dependent upon and in which we may turn to instead of relying upon God. **Knowing that God has called us to obedience based on love and not on demanding compliance. 1 Peter 4:1-2** tells us:

¹So then, since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too. For if you are willing to suffer

for Christ, you have decided to stop sinning. ²And you won't spend the rest of your life chasing after evil desires, but you will be anxious to do the will of God.

3. Give it UP – living our lives in an attitude of worship or praise. Taking everything we do and focusing it towards God. A heart of worship. **1 Thessalonians 5:18** tells us:

¹⁶Always be joyful. ¹⁷Keep on praying. ¹⁸No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

God not only wants to awaken our hearts, he wants us to enter into this year ready and willing to make our lives count, let every experience in our lives over the coming years to develop us and mature us in our walk with him. We can continue to live our lives based on the sinful things in this world, continue to struggle, continue to live in turmoil, or we can make a choice to allow him to renew us and allow this year to be the most fruitful.

The principles I am talking about today apply to each of us personally. Yet the principles also speak to us as a group of people who have committed ourselves to pursue the things of God together. My prayer is that we will walk through the door of opportunity and into the fullness of all that God has for us. Let's pray!