

Open the Eyes of Our Hearts, Lord

Rich Nathan

May 19-20, 2007

Spiritual Warfare: God At War Series

2 Kings 6:8-23

I want to begin with a story about a 15-year old boy named Bobby. It's a true story. Bobby's older brother, Stuart, who was 16, committed suicide in June by shooting himself in the head with his .22 caliber rifle. Bobby initially seemed to handle his brother's death pretty well. But from the beginning of school in September, his academic performance began to slip. He was an A-B student his whole life, but now he was failing all of his classes. By Thanksgiving he was obviously depressed.

His parents seemed very concerned. They tried to talk with him, but Bobby basically stopped talking. And even though he had no prior history of anti-social behavior, he stole a car by himself, crashed it into another car, and was apprehended by the police. As part of the court proceeding, Bobby was sent for psychiatric evaluation. And I want to pick up with a transcript of the psychiatrist's interview with Bobby. Bobby was non-communicative; 15-year old boys generally are. Anyway, Bobby basically gave one-word answers to the psychiatrist's questions. So the psychiatrist decided to take a different tack with him; something that might elicit enthusiasm from a 15-year old. He said:

"It's not long since Christmas. What did you get for Christmas?"

"Nothing much."

"Your parents must have given you something. What did they give you?"

"A gun."

"A gun?" I repeated stupidly.

"Yes."

"What kind of gun," I asked slowly.

"A .22."

"A .22 pistol?"

"No, a .22 rifle."

There was a long moment of silence. I felt as if I had lost my bearings. I wanted to stop the interview. I wanted to go home. Finally, I pushed myself to say what had to be said.

"I understand that it was with a .22 rifle that your brother killed himself."

"Yes."

"Was that what you asked for for Christmas?"

"No."

"What did you ask for?"

"A tennis racket."

"But you got the gun instead."

"How did you feel getting the same kind of gun that your brother had?"

"It wasn't the same kind of gun."

I began to feel better. Maybe I was just confused.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I thought they were the same kind of gun."

"It wasn't the same kind of gun," Bobby replied. "It was THE gun."

"THE gun?"

"Yes."

"You mean it was your brother's gun?"

I wanted to go home very badly now.

"Yes."

"You mean your parents gave you your brother's gun for Christmas – the one he shot himself with?"

"Yes."

You are the psychiatrist. How would you account for a mother and a father giving a depressed teenage son a rifle for Christmas which was the very rifle that his brother used to kill himself?

Let me tell you another story. In the summer of 1976 there was a series of shootings that terrified New York City and gained international press coverage. The shooter was dubbed "The .44 Caliber Killer" after his weapon of choice. Beginning on July 29, 1976 two young women, one named Donna, the other named Jody, were both shot as they sat inside a parked car on a street outside of Donna's apartment in the Bronx. Donna was killed; Jody survived.

In October there was another shooting. This time it occurred in Queens. Again, the victims were in a parked car.

A month later in November, two other teenagers were shot as they walked home from a movie. And then in the new year, in January, an engaged couple was shot as they sat together in their parked car. In March a college student was shot by a passerby as he walked in Queens. As I said, NYC was terrorized by this string of shootings, particularly when the police announced that the same .44 caliber pistol had been used in the various shootings.

This killer wrote a letter to the police saying that he was ordered to kill these various people by a person named "Sam," and he called himself "The Son of Sam." How do you account for serial killings like the Son of Sam, or mass murders like what happened at Virginia Tech? Do you say, "Well these people

are just psychologically deranged?" Clearly, they are. Is it just that they've been mistreated by parents, or by others? Often, that's the case.

But let me share with you David Berkowitz's own assessment of why he committed these killings. David Berkowitz said that ever since he was a small child his life was filled with torment. He would have seizures and land on the floor. When these various attacks came he sometimes felt that something was entering him. He used to get into lots of fights in public school. Sometimes he would start screaming for no particular reason. He just felt an evil force come over him.

Occasionally, when this evil force came upon him in the middle of the night, he felt an urge to sneak out of his apartment. He roamed his neighborhood, he said, like an alley cat. He liked walking around on the dark streets. David said that he struggled constantly with thoughts of suicide. He often desired to throw himself in front of a passing car, or in front of subway trains. He talked with rabbis, with teachers, and with school counselors. Nothing worked.

In 1975 he met some guys at a party who were into Satanism and witchcraft. He was always fascinated with those kinds of things from the time he was a child. He was now 22 and he said this evil force was still reaching out to him. Everywhere he went there seemed to be a sign or symbol pointing him to Satan. Let me read from David Berkowitz's own words. He said,

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I felt as if something were trying to take control of my life. I began to read the Satanic Bible by the late Anton LaVey, who founded the Church of Satan in San Francisco in 1966. I began, innocently, to practice various occult rituals and incantations.

I am utterly convinced that something Satanic had entered into my mind and that looking back at all that happened, I realize that I had been slowly deceived and I was gradually giving more and more of my life over to Satan. I did not know that bad things were going to result from all of this. Yet, over the months the things that were wicked no longer seemed to be such. I was headed down the road to destruction and I did not know it. Maybe I was at a point where I just didn't care anymore.

What do you think of David Berkowitz's explanation for his murder of six people and his wounding of many others? David, by the way, said that Sam was not a person. He was an old spirit, an ancient spirit that spoke to him through his neighbor's dog.

Was David Berkowitz just another schizophrenic that heard voices in his head? And what about Bobby's parents; the folks who gave their son the rifle as a

Christmas gift – the gun that his own brother used to kill himself? Was that just a lapse of judgment? A mistake? Bad parenting?

On a more global scale, when you hear news of genocide around the world like the slaughter of the Tutsi by the Hutu militia in one explosive orgy of slaughter in which hundreds of thousands of Tutsi men, women and children were macheted to death, what do you say to yourself? How do you account for horrific evil that we see all around us in the world? What about the much more mundane struggles we have with life?

Let me give you a couple of simple case studies.

SLIDE – Case #1

Amy is nauseated by a smell, almost any smell. Today she can hardly see as she drives home at 5:00 p.m. The sunlight gives her a pounding headache. While she is driving she throws a bunch of Ibuprofen in her mouth. Her temples throb with debilitating pain for the second time this month. Like many other Christian women, Amy may be suffering from:

- A) A migraine headache
- B) PMS
- C) Demonic harassment
- D) All of the Above

Now, here is Case #2

SLIDE – Case #2

Bob catches a glimpse of porn actors undressing as he surfs his hotel TV. At first, he feels like he should change the channel, but something makes him linger. He indulges. Later, he despises himself, but he finds that he regularly indulges his appetite for pornography online and through videos and books. Like many other Christian men, Bob wishes he could get rid of his involvement with pornography. What is Bob's problem?

- A) Psychological Addiction
- B) His fallen sinful nature
- C) Demonic bondage
- D) All of the above

Today, I'm going to begin a new series that deals with the unseen spiritual world – a world that contains personal spiritual evil known in the Bible as Satan and the demonic. I'm calling this series "God at War." But it is our utter lack of awareness of this unseen spiritual world, especially the world of spiritual evil that I want to address today. I've called today's talk, "Open the Eyes of Our Hearts, Lord." Let's pray.

Along with the pure evil that I described in my introduction, every Christian ought to be sensitive to attacks on our Christian brothers and sisters around the world. There are organizations like Voice of the Martyrs

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www.persecution.com

And you can find out more about what's happening to your Christian brothers and sisters in various countries. And through this organization you can pray and petition our own government and other governments – public opinion really does make a difference. But there have been violent attacks against the church from the beginning – for 20 centuries – from the slaughter of the early Christians to attacks on the Salvation Army in the 1800's.

Attacks on the Salvation Army. Do you know the Salvation Army, don't you? They are those incredible people who have for a century and a half ministered to the poorest of the poor. They are those people who draw near to folks who many of us walk around – people who stink from alcohol, folks who haven't bathed in weeks, whose clothes are tattered. The Salvation Army reaches out to people like that.

Let me read to you an account of the treatment of Salvation Army workers back in the 1880's. This historian writes in the city of Whitechapel:

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Salvation Army teenage girls were roped together like cattle and pelted with live coals. On dark nights hooligans used sprinklers to shower the marching Salvation Army troops with tar and burning sulfur. In one year alone, 1882, 669 Salvation Army soldiers were knocked down or brutally assaulted. 60 Salvation Army buildings were wrecked by mobs. The British police refused to intervene because they hated the Salvation Army as well. In one city, Oldham, a hundred young men decided to form what they called a "skeleton army", sort of a mocking of the Salvation Army. They wore skulls and crossbones. They knocked Salvation Army girls to the ground and kicked them mercilessly. They opened up subscription lists and all the over the country brewers and tavern keepers contributed money so that the Salvation Army workers would be beaten.

Let me ask you: what could possibly energize this kind of hatred against those who are just trying to do good? Why would anyone knock down a Salvation Army teenage girl, kick her, spit on her, burn down her place of worship?

Let me bring this down from issues of great evil to the mundane situations of our own lives. You are leaving church; you've heard a great message; maybe you've had an opportunity to receive prayer, or you felt particularly close to God during the worship. On the way home from church one of your children throws up in the backseat, your car breaks down, or your spouse raises one of those really

difficult issues in your marriage and you immediately get into a fight. Or you find yourself assaulted by a temptation. What's going on?

You find yourself tempted again in an area in which you are really trying to do well – your eating habits, your sexuality, your anger, your tendency towards depression. You are continually hassled by your ex with another lawsuit. There doesn't seem to be any real breakthrough for you financially, no matter what you do or how you pray.

Turn with me to 2 Kings 6:8-20,

SLIDE – 2 Kings 6:8-20

8 Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, "I will set up my camp in such and such a place." 9 The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: "Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there." 10 So the king of Israel checked on the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was on his guard in such places. 11 This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, "Tell me! Which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?" 12 "None of us, my lord the king," said one of his officers, "but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom." 13 "Go, find out where he is," the king ordered, "so I can send men and capture him." The report came back: "He is in Dothan." 14 Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city. 15 When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?" the servant asked. 16 "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." 17 And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. 18 As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, "Strike this army with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked. 19 Elisha told them, "This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for." And he led them to Samaria. 20 After they entered the city, Elisha said, "Lord, open the eyes of these men so they can see." Then the Lord opened their eyes and they looked, and there they were, inside Samaria.

Now, we are back in the 9th century BC in ancient Israel. We are reading about the ministry of one of the great prophets of the Old Testament named Elisha. It was a time of spiritual confusion for the people of Israel. There was much worship of the Canaanite god, Baal. And one of Israel's neighbors, the nation of Syria, regularly made military raids against the nation of Israel. This is the story of the opening of eyes that are blind.

Now, what we discover in 2 Kings 6 is the way that God delivers his people from these military raids. How did Israel beat back their enemies? They didn't do it by their superior military power. Israel didn't beat their enemies back by raising a huge army. They didn't beat their enemies back by superior strategic thinking. The way that Israel beat their enemies back was through spiritual gifting – specifically gifts of revelation. In vv. 8-12 we read the really humorous account of the King of Aram's (which is Syria) frustration that his plans are regularly known ahead of time to the King of Israel. And the King of Aram suspects a spy or a traitor in his midst. Wouldn't it be great to have someone like Elisha as part of our intelligence services? I wonder what we would have done in Iraq, if Elisha had been advising us.

There is no spy, there is no traitor. What we have is an illustration of spiritual gifting – in particular, the spiritual gift of prophecy. God is giving revelation to Elisha concerning the plans of the enemy against God's people. And then in vv. 15-17, we read about the servant of Elisha who sees the city surrounded by enemy soldiers and cries out in fear. This servant can only see in the natural realm. He can only see in the realm of the physical. He can only take in empirical data. He is thoroughly out of touch with the spiritual world. And so Elisha prays in v. 17,

SLIDE – 2 Kings 6:17

17 And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

I believe Elisha's prayer:

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"Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see."

Needs to be the prayer of every Christian every day. Open the eyes of our hearts, Lord, so that we may see. Very simply, I believe that one of the major causes of spiritual ineffectiveness is that we Christians are utterly out of touch; we are blind to spiritual reality and the spiritual world. In the Bible the biblical writers constantly prayed for a spirit of revelation. So we read in Ephesians 1:17-21 these words:

SLIDE – Eph 1:17-21

17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all

rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that can be invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

If our eyes were opened, if we received a spirit of revelation from God, what would we see? We would see a universe at war. Gene Peterson, who wrote the wonderful paraphrase of the Bible called *The Message*, writes this:

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There is a spiritual war in progress, an all-out moral battle. There is evil and cruelty, unhappiness and illness. There is superstition and ignorance, brutality and pain. God is in continuous and energetic battle against all of it. God is for life and against death. God is for love and against hate. God is for hope and against despair. God is for heaven and against hell. There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square foot of space is contested.

I believe that the major cause of Christian spiritual ineffectiveness is that we do not see that we live in the middle of a war zone. We are peace-time Christians and we are constantly surprised when we face opposition, when our spiritual growth seems to be impeded. Most of the time we live our Christian lives like that servant of God, who couldn't see the spiritual world around him. We can't understand why life is hard. We don't understand why we struggle and keep getting defeated by temptation.

Years ago I had a picture of what most of us as followers of Christ are like. We are like people on a football team who practice various plays. We expect that we are going to go out on the field as Christians, hand the ball off, and run for touchdown after touchdown. All we need to do is throw the pass and it will be caught. We'll just run up and down the field all day scoring points. So we Christians are taught that if we have our devotions, if we keep ourselves morally clean, if we pray and attend church and give, then our lives will succeed.

But our lives don't succeed in a straight-forward line even upward. Life is a lot harder than we've been taught. We hand off the ball and the ball carrier's immediately slammed to the ground for a loss. We throw a pass and it is picked off. Our noses get bloodied. Some of our teammates are carried off the field with injuries. There is dissention on our team. Some of the members of our team actually begin to fight with each other. What's the issue?

The issue is that there is another team on the field. We are not playing by ourselves. We have opposition. Just understanding, friends, that you are in a war makes life so much more comprehensible. You can finally say, "Ah, now I see. Now I grasp why even when we go out to the community to serve, someone will curse at us." Now I understand why when an invited guest is finally going to come to church after numerous invitations, at the last minute their child gets sick or their car breaks down. I understand why every time I resolve to wake up early to pray or read the Bible, something distracts me. Now I understand that why

when we plant a church there will be all kinds of disruptions and division and the church planter's family may get sick. And when we engage in missions suddenly someone comes down with a weird illness or why there is team in-fighting or government and bureaucratic hassles. I understand what's going on because we are in a war. That's why we need to constantly pray for our missionaries and pray for our church and our friends and families, and those we might share the gospel with. There is a basic principle of the way the Kingdom of God moves forward in this world. The kingdom attacks the forces of darkness, but there is always counter attack. Attack and counter-attack is a fundamental principle in the life of the Kingdom.

Now, every major religion has understood this. And every group of people around the world before the time of the enlightenment, every single tribe, every single people group, understood that they were in a spiritual war. And so wherever you go around the world, where people have not been impacted by western enlightenment thinking, people perceive that there are good and evil spirits, witchcraft, occult forces, that there is personal evil embodied in someone that the Bible calls Satan. This belief in personal embodied evil may seem medieval or archaic. Folks say, "Oh, you Christians believe in the Devil, a real Devil – a cute little fellow with horns and a pitchfork? Do you also believe in a flat Earth, and the tooth fairy?"

If you claim to be a Christian, which means that you are a follower of Jesus, that you take Jesus as your Master Teacher, then you need to know that Jesus believed in the Devil. Jesus' teaching is filled with references to the Devil. He said the Evil One was constantly snatching away from people's hearts the seed of God's Word. Every time God's Word is preached, Jesus said Satan snatches it away from some of the listeners so it has no impact. He warned that everywhere that God was sowing wheat, the Devil was sowing weeds. He told the leaders who were opposed to him that they were simply following their father, who was the Devil. He taught his disciples that Satan wanted to destroy them.

In fact, the most frequently performed miracle that Jesus did was the casting out of demons. There is no activity that Jesus did more often than to cast out demons. And those of you who are Christians who make fun of deliverance, who say that that is just the lunatic fringe of the Christian church, that it is weird, that it makes you uncomfortable, you need to reread the gospel accounts of Jesus, the one you claim to follow, and recognize that Jesus, our Lord, put a lot of stock into deliverance. He was regularly setting people free from demons.

The early church believed in the Devil. There is Yale historian named Ramsay MacMullen who has written that one of the major reasons why Christianity overtook the Roman Empire was because Christians had an answer to the demonic oppression that people suffered and no other religion had that answer. One writer put it this way:

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The most noticeable mark of the early church was its ability to deal with the spirit world in the Roman Empire...I am persuaded that an important factor in the Christian success in the Roman world was the promise which it made of deliverance from demons.

Early Christians all went through deliverance before they were baptized. And renouncing the devil was part of the Early Church liturgy for baptism. From the New Testament onward Christian mission was contained the elements of driving out demons. And you see this throughout the church's history, particularly among Catholics. Ignatius of Loyola wrote a manual on spiritual warfare which is still wildly used at Jesuit Retreat Centers. Luther wrote constantly about the work of Satan. And you see even in the 21st century and explosion of occult activity. Wicca just recently has been recognized by the US Military so that its five-pointed star can now be placed on tombstones of practitioners of Wicca in the military. We are seeing more and more interest in magic and in witchcraft in popular media.

The best-selling book right now on the New York Times Best-Sellers List is a book called *The Secret*. It is everywhere. You certainly must have seen it in the bookstores. It has been on Oprah several times. Every talk show has hosted the authors. Larry King has had the authors on his TV show. *The Secret* is all about this so-called Law of Attraction which the author calls "The Secret" in which you learn what is claimed to have been known by every great genius – Einstein, da Vinci, Alexander the Great, through powers of concentration can bend the universe according to your own desires. It is what used to be called the practice of magic or witchcraft and is now seen as just another form of American self-help.

And yet, in the midst of this explosion of occult interest in popular media and in practice, with this refashioning of witchcraft for 21st century American consumption, much of the church is largely ignorant of and dismisses the demonic realm as a relic of past superstition and medieval beliefs, or we say it exists, but we act as if it has no impact on our lives. Why don't we see what the Bible tells us we need to see?

There was a Christian missiologist, a specialist in foreign missions, named Paul Hiebert. Paul Hiebert was himself a missionary and he wrote a really important article called "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle."

What Hiebert argues was among Christians in the west, we believe in God up in heaven and ultimate judgment. And we also believe in science and psychology. But the two realms between God up in heaven and what is happening here on earth, virtually never touch. Whereas, in more traditional society, there is a middle level of spiritual power that actually touches the earth. Spiritual beings and spiritual powers are not confined to another universe, to another realm, but

in more traditional societies, and in the Bible, in the early church, in much of the church's history, and in most pre-enlightenment societies, there is this view that there are these middle level spiritual powers that impact us in this world. We are not aware of these middle level powers because we have been trained to not see, to come up with alternative explanations. Our worldview always seeks a naturalistic explanation for what may also have a spiritual cause.

So David Berkowitz we say was psychotic. And the parents of Bobby we say were just terribly misinformed regarding how to relate to a depressed teenager. And the killer at Virginia Tech we say struggled with rejection. And the Hutus in Rwanda were subject to cultural and economic forces which drove them to murder their neighbors. And all of our illnesses simply have an organic cause, and all of our addictions are merely psychological.

The excluded middle, a blindness to spiritual powers that impact our lives as Christians.

My dear friend, Don Williams, who recently retired from pastoring after 40 years, who has spoken at this church on many occasions, said that he went to seminary seeking God and he was trained to be a scientist. Seminary trained him, he said, to be spiritually blind. And you could say the same thing about your own medical school or nursing school training, your own university training, your training in psychology or sociology or biology or law. This is true in your high school and it is even true in many Christian high schools. There is simply no room for a spiritual realm that involves spirits that really impact our lives and this world. We are like Elisha's servant; we don't see the real spiritual realm all around us.

Well, what must we see when we pray, "Open the eyes of my heart, Lord?" What is it that we want to have an awareness of? What do we need to know? In Hosea 4:6 God declares through his prophet:

SLIDE – Hosea 4:6

6 my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. "Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children.

The people of Israel were religious. They were involved in various religious rituals. But they were spiritually very dull. What do we need to know? Well, before we need to know anything about Satan, or the work of evil spirits, we need to know God our Father better. Ephesians 1:17,

SLIDE – Eph 1:17

17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

We need to be able to believe that God is indeed our Father, that we can trust him for good in our lives, that he is our protector and provider. We need to know we are special to our Father in heaven; that our father in heaven loves us. We not only need to know the Father, we need to know that victory is assured over every demonic power. Ephesians 1:18,

SLIDE – Eph 1:18

18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his people,

Whatever we are going through, we need to know the old spiritual that says we shall overcome. We need to know our identity and our authority in Christ. Ephesians 1.19-21

SLIDE – Eph 1:19-21

19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that can be invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

We need to know the spiritual power that is available for us – power to heal, power to cast out demons. We need to know Christ's love for us. Eph. 3:16-19,

SLIDE – Eph 3:16-19

16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

We also need to be aware of the work of the Evil One, that we are in a war, that there is no such thing as a peacetime Christian, that we will constantly face opposition. Forward progress is hard. There are attacks regularly leveled against you, against your family, against the church and especially against Christian leaders. We need to understand this principle of attack and counter-attack – to be prepared for pushback and not be surprised or discouraged by it. Throughout this series, as I am talking about spiritual warfare, I don't want us to get Satan-centered, or demon-focused. The Christian is always to keep their eyes firmly on Jesus. We are always to be Christ-centered, God-centered. But we are to be aware of Satan in our peripheral vision. The way I would describe it would be like driving. We always look at the road ahead of us, at the car ahead of us. But with our peripheral vision we are aware of everything that is happening around us – other cars that may cut us off; hazards on the side of the road. The

Christian ought to have Satan in their peripheral vision while they are focusing on Jesus.

You say, “Why must I pray that the eyes of my heart should be opened? Why must I be aware that I am in a war?”

I’m going to talk about this throughout this series, but let me close with just a few take-away points:

You need to be aware that you are in a war so that you will watch and pray. Soldiers, when they are in a war zone, are always in a heightened state of alert. Often times a soldier won’t sleep. They post sentries to watch for the enemy. Throughout the Bible we are encouraged to watch and pray. So Jesus says in Matthew 26:41,

SLIDE – Mt 26:41

41 “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

I don’t mean by any of this that you ought to go through life stressed out. But you ought to be asking the Lord for an alertness, a spiritual awareness, a sharpening of your spiritual faculties from the normal spiritual dullness that we live in all the time. “God, make me aware of what’s going on right now in my family. Make me aware of the spiritual dynamics of my workplace. God, make me aware of what I am drinking in constantly as I sit in front of my TV, the dullness to my moral faculties, the dullness to issues of greed or justice, or lust. Wake me up from my spiritual sleepiness.”

Which leads to a second reason why you ought to pray to see: Because the stakes are so high for you spiritually.

The Bible teaches that Satan wishes to gain a foothold in your life. You have a spiritual enemy who seeks to kill you and your family spiritually. The way that he does that is by gaining a foothold in your life through sin. Sin is not as we often assume just our personal little foibles that we ask forgiveness for. Sin can open a door in our lives to spiritual darkness and the demonic. So unforgiveness harbored long enough, or sexual sin practiced long enough, or anger given vent to often enough, or fear and anxiety given in to often enough can lead to a spiritual bondage in the life of a Christian that simple confession will no longer overcome.

We can find ourselves trapped in a place we never wanted to be. The stakes are high. Our spiritual effectiveness, our feeling of connection with God, our liberty to operate without shackles on can be taken from us.

Why should we want to see? Because seeing in the spiritual world will cause us to take sin more seriously. By the way, the reason we have recovery groups here and professional and lay counseling is, in part, so that you might discover freedom.

Why else should we want to see? Because I believe one of the most significant keys to the expansion of the church in Columbus, Ohio and in America, the issue for many people in the world right now is not what is true. Can you present me with a clever argument in favor of your God? The question that is burning in the hearts of more and more people: Do you have anything powerful enough to set me free from my addiction and the bondage that I'm living in? And I will give my allegiance to any power that can release me from the thing that oppresses me.

More and more Americans struggle with addictions to over-eating or an eating disorder, to pornography, drugs, alcohol, homosexuality, depression, mental illness and anxiety disorders. Virtually every child in our middle school group has seen pornography at home, online, or at a friend's house. More and more Americans are broken and abused physically and sexually. More and more Americans are growing up in broken homes. They are neglected and trapped. We are returning to a time like the time of the early church where the question is a question of power. Spiritually anemic, spiritually blind, post-enlightenment Christianity that simply deal with logical arguments will prove less and less effective in reaching 21st century people for Christ. We need a Christianity filled with power. We need a Christianity like that practiced by the early church – one that provides a real answer for demonic bondage. We need a Christianity filled with spiritual awareness. Open the eyes of our hearts, Lord, that we may see. Let's pray.

Open the Eyes Of Our Hearts, Lord

**Rich Nathan
May 19-20, 2007
God At War
2 Kings 6.8-20**

I. How Do We Understand Evil?

II. Why Is The Church So Ineffective? (2 Kings 6.8-20)

III. What Does The Bible And Church History Teach Us?

IV. Why Don't We See?

V. What Must We See?

VI. Why Must We See?