



Good morning and welcome to the North Campus of Central Peninsula Church. Happy Easter everyone! You all look great and I am so glad we are together to celebrate what I believe is the most significant event in all of history—the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

For centuries, people all over the world have gathered for over 2,000 years to proclaim this wonderful and powerful message: “Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.” I believe that inside all of us, there is a longing for significance and a desire for something more in this life. Blaise Pascal the famous mathematician and philosopher would agree. He wrote: “There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus.”

That is true for all of us. What we share in common, whether we realize it or not, is a need for a spiritual awakening. Former U.S. president Franklin Roosevelt remarked, “I doubt if there is a problem—political or economic—that will not melt before the fire of a spiritual awakening.” Like me, you want your life to count. You want a life of significance. You don’t just want to survive this life, you want to thrive. We all want to awaken to what’s real and meaningful.

People throughout the ages have looked into these mysteries. George Lucas, the genius behind *Star Wars* also understood this. How many of you are *Star Wars* fans? Behind every powerful Jedi and his or her lightsaber is the invisible Force. I’ve always wondered if the Force had any spiritual significance and I found out it does. George Lucas, in *Time* magazine answers, “I put the force in the movie (Star Wars) in order to awaken a certain kind of spirituality in young people more a belief in God than a belief in any particular religious system. I wanted to make it so that young people would begin to ask questions about the mystery. Not having enough interest in the mysteries of life to ask the question, ‘Is there a God or is there not a God?’ this is for me the worst thing that can happen. I think you should have an opinion about that. Or you should be saying, ‘I’m looking. I’m very curious about this and am going to continue to look until I can find an answer, and if I can’t find an answer then I’ll die trying.’ I think it’s important to have a belief system and to have a faith.” I agree.

God often uses the events in our lives to awaken within us a desire for him. For Phil Robertson of the hit show *Duck Dynasty*,

drugs, sex and rock-n-roll awakened him to a new life in Jesus Christ. As you can see, our Easter theme this year is **Awaken**. What does it mean to be awakened? Is this some type of weird religious thing or is this an experience we all can have? The stories and authors of the Bible have some insight and wisdom about this idea of awakening. In fact, they write about three different types of awakening. To awaken, you have to first be asleep. And when the Bible talks about sleep, it points to three different things. In other words, there’s not one but three kinds of sleep, and with that there are three ways of being awakened.

### **Awaken from Natural Sleep**

The first is to be awakened from natural sleep. This is the most obvious one and that’s to be awakened from physical sleep. I love to sleep! With three young children a good night’s sleep is a luxury rarely experienced at the Hall household. Some of you can survive on very little sleep. Not me. Back in my college days, I chose to live on campus all four years so that I could quickly and easily get a nap every day. It was all about priorities then.

Physical sleep is good; it’s a blessing; it’s something we all need. Most of us will spend about a third of our lives sleeping. God is our Creator and he made us in such a way that we need sleep for our physical and emotional health. No one can deny that. This kind of sleep is also temporary and sooner or later we wake up, hopefully rested and refreshed. We also know that too much sleep isn’t good. Listen to the wise words from King Solomon, *“How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man”* (Proverbs 6:9–10). That is a helpful verse to remind your teenagers about and post on their bed frames!

While we need sleep, it’s important to understand God does not sleep. Psalm 121:4 says, *“Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.”* God never gets tired. He never sleeps. After he created the world, he chose to rest, but he didn’t need to. We on the other hand need it. The ability to sleep isn’t only a gift from God but it’s an expression of our faith and trust in him. Listen to Psalm 4:8, *“In peace I will lay down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.”* Statistics show that Americans are among the world’s leaders in sleep deprivation. There are many reasons for that. One of the reasons we don’t

sleep well is because we are worried and anxious. But, God made us to need sleep as a continual reminder that we are not God and we should not worry but rest in him.

## Spiritual Awakening

There's a second kind of awaken and that's what we commonly think of when it comes to being spiritually awakened. The Bible talks about this as spiritual or moral sleep. While natural sleep is a good thing, this kind of sleep is a bad thing. When we are asleep spiritually or morally, we fail to be alert, watchful and awake in all the right ways. The great tragedy in life is to spend our lives spiritually asleep. It means we are not attuned to the things of God. We are not aware of his activity in the world or our lives and we easily succumb to temptation.

Actor Tim Allen put it this way, "How much of the day are you awake? You think, I gotta get the dry cleaning, I gotta get going... All of a sudden it's dinnertime...Then you read and go to bed, wake up, and it's the same all over. You're not awake, you're not living, you're not experiencing...It's daunting how many possibilities there are in life for every one of us. But, rather than face that I may be a failure or a success (I think both of them are terrifying) people find diversions." He's right. I can relate to that. It's so easy to go through the motions of our daily lives. But this isn't just about being awake to possibilities, but it's being awake to God. Not just alive and breathing, but fully alive and in relationship with Jesus.

Right before his arrest, Jesus placed all but three of his disciples on the lookout, telling them to sit while he goes off to pray in the Garden of Gethsemene. He then pulled Peter, James and John deeper into the garden. A few minutes later, he asked the three of them to stay and keep watch. He went off to pray, but soon his praying was interrupted by their snoring. He came back, woke them up from their slumber and said to Peter, "*Simon, are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak*" (Mark 14:37–38). This happened three times! The whole point seems to be that if we're not spiritually awake we're vulnerable to temptation. Why? Because we're weak. We may want to do the right thing, but we often fail.

The apostle Paul picked up on this idea in the book of Romans. He wanted to encourage the believers there to live every day with their eyes wide awake. He said, "*The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not*

*think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh*" (Romans 13:11b–14).

So while natural sleep is a gift of God, spiritual sleep is a danger. Every moment of every day we need to be awake. Being spiritually awake means you're alert to temptation, you strip away sin by God's grace. You clothe yourself with Christ and you're ready for his return. You are not just awakened to spirituality, but awakened in relationship with Jesus Christ.

## Awaken from Death

There's a third way the Bible talks about awakening and sleep. This is the most important for today. The Bible uses sleep as a metaphor for death. Consider a story from the life of Jesus. In the gospel of Mark, Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, was a desperate man. He ran into the presence of Jesus, threw himself on the ground before him, and pleaded earnestly for Jesus to come and put his hand on his little girl, who was at the point of death. Jesus responded and headed for Jairus' home, but on the way there, he ran into a woman who had been sick for 38 years. You can imagine Jairus' frustration as the Lord stops to heal her: "*Lord, we're running out of time.*" While Jesus was speaking, some men came and reported, "*The girl is dead. Why bother Jesus any more?*" But Jesus said, "*Don't be afraid. Just believe.*" When he finally arrived at the home, the professional mourners had gathered and were doing their thing. According to the custom of the day, they were ripping their garments, tearing their hair, and crying with loud shrieks. Jesus came in and announced, "*What's all the commotion about? She's not dead. She's asleep.*" Who is right? They're the professionals. They know what death is. She's not asleep. She's dead. But Jesus says, "No, she's asleep."

Why does Jesus talk like that? To most people, death is permanent; sleep is temporary. Death is the end of life; sleep is the reinvigoration of life. When you fall asleep, you expect to wake up. Jesus is saying that because of who he is, death is temporary. Death is actually the continuation of life, not the end. Jesus demonstrated his power over death as he walked into that 12-year-old girl's room and said to her, "*Little girl, I say to you, get up!*" The Bible says, "*Immediately, the girl stood up and began to walk around.*" She was awakened.

Jesus even understood this when it came to his own death. One of the prayers Jesus prayed while he was on the cross came from Psalm 31:5, "*Into your hands I commit my spirit.*" Those same words were also the first prayer every Jewish mother taught her child before they went to sleep at night. When Jesus was about to die on the cross, he prayed that prayer as if he was falling asleep. And he was! All four gospel accounts testify that on the third day he rose from the grave. Jesus, through that one act of awakening defeated sin, Satan and death.

So when the New Testament writers talk about the death of a believer in Jesus Christ, they prefer to use this image of sleep. In 1 Corinthians 15 the Apostle Paul defends the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Three times in that chapter he speaks of the death of believers as falling asleep. In verse 6 he says that after he died Jesus *“appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.”* In verses 17–18 he says, *“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.”* Finally, at the end of the chapter he says, *“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed”* (verses 51–52).

When you wake up tomorrow morning let me encourage you to think about three things. First, thank God for a good night's sleep and for waking you up to a new day in which you can walk with him and serve him. Second, ask God to keep you spiritually and morally awake throughout the day; to keep you alert to any temptations that might come your way; to keep you alert to the

promise that he could return at any moment. Third, trust God's promise that though one day you'll sleep the sleep of death, you'll wake up in the presence of God through the power of the resurrection. You don't have to fear death any more than you fear falling asleep. “Don't be afraid. Just believe.”

Maybe you're here today and you just don't have that confidence. On one occasion Jesus said to his friend Mary, *“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.”* Then he asked her, *“Do you believe this?”* (John 11:25). And that's the question I want to leave you with, “Do **you** believe this?” If you do believe it, you don't have to fear death any more than you fear falling asleep. You don't need to be afraid of anyone or anything anymore. Jesus is greater than your greatest fears. A relationship with Jesus awakens us to forgiveness, hope, power, and grace.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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Catalog No. 1385-N

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This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, March 31, 2013 at Central Peninsula Church North  
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