

Power From Above: Understanding the Spiritual Realm

Reflection by Michael Dutschke

Jo: Judging by the number of horror movies out there, our society seems to have quite the fascination with the spiritual realm. While some find it fascinating, others find it scary, thinking that perhaps we shouldn't meddle with things outside of our understanding. Christians know that there is a spiritual element to our existence, but we don't always know what to do about it. So how do we work out what is really going on without getting caught up in the speculation and horror stories? And is any of it relevant for our everyday life?

Today, Pastor Michael shares some helpful insights to help us understand the spiritual realm and our role in it.

Michael: On a number of occasions, I've surveyed people to find out their ideas about what happens in the spiritual realm – the world which we cannot see. I've asked them how much of what happens in the spiritual realm do you think impacts on your day-to-day living?

The answers vary from 'basically nothing' to 'a huge impact'. I also ask, how much impact do you have in the spiritual realm? Again, the replies range between 'some' and 'a lot', and there's also the, 'I don't know' group.

My next question is a tricky one: what specifically do you do that impacts the spiritual world? The answers include 'prayer' and 'how I live my life'. My short survey certainly reveals a variety of ideas about what goes on in the spiritual realm, how it impacts us and how we impact it.

I once read in the newspaper that an insurance survey revealed that one third of all Britains believe that their houses are haunted, and a quarter are convinced that a poltergeist has moved their possessions. If they believe that, what do they believe they can do about it?

Lots of people have lots of different opinions based on what they have experienced and how they have interpreted those experiences. But what does the Bible say about the spiritual realm?

One book that says a lot on this subject is Ephesians. In Ephesians, the author, Paul refers to the spiritual world as the heavenly realms.

I've travelled to Vietnam, and you don't have to convince the Vietnamese people that there is a spiritual realm. I've spent time teaching about the spiritual realm in Vietnam based on what we read in the book of Ephesians. From that teaching, the Vietnamese people have told me they have learn about the authority, the power we have as Christians in the heavenly realms.

In the New Testament times, the people of Ephesus were also very aware that there is a spiritual realm. Witchcraft was practiced, there was a temple to the pagan goddess Artemis, and the people witnessed demonic manifestations in others as well as miraculous healings through Paul. Paul didn't have to convince the Ephesians of the existence of the heavenly realms, but he did need to teach them the truth about what goes on there.

So what does happen in the heavenly realms in the world that we cannot touch and we cannot see? Who is there? What do they do? And what has it got to do with me?

In the heavenly realms, we have every spiritual blessing. As Paul says in Ephesians:

'All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms.' (Ephesians 1:3)

It is also where Jesus is. Paul writes:

'God raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honour at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.' (Ephesians 1:20).

You and I are in the heavenly realms too. Ephesians says:

'God raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus.' (Ephesians 2:6)

If you are a Christian, you are already living in the heavenly realms. Not you *will* be or *could* be, but you *are* right now. It is a present reality. And Ephesians is not the only place in the Bible where we are told that we live in the heavenly realms. Luke says, *'the kingdom of God is already among you'* (Luke 17:21).

If you thought you couldn't be in two places at once, think again. You're living life here on Earth *and* you're sitting with Jesus in the heavenly realms.

The heavenly realms are also where rulers and authorities are, as St. Paul tells us in Ephesians:

'God's purpose was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.' (Ephesians 3:10)

So what are those who are in the heavenly realms doing waging war against you and me? Again, in Ephesians we read:

'For we are not fighting against flesh and blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.' (Ephesians 6:12)

Importantly, it is not a battle between Jesus and the devil. With the results still undecided through Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection, Jesus defeated the devil and victory has been won.

At the time that Jesus decides, there is no question that the devil and all other evil forces will end up in hell. Until that time, there is still a battle going on in the heavenly realms. Jesus isn't fighting the devil and his forces. We are the ones in the battle and what we do as we live our day to day lives does have a huge spiritual impact, which in turn has an impact on our day-to-day lives.

For example, did you know that making peace with someone who you are angry with makes an impact in the heavenly realms? St. Paul tells us:

'Don't sin by letting anger control over you. Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry. For anger gives a mighty foothold to the devil.' ((Ephesians 4:26-27)

Dealing with anger has an impact on earth and in the heavenly realms. It stops the devil from getting a foothold in your life.

When we are baptised, Christians are born again into God's family and are also seated in the heavenly realms. So my spirit is in two places, here in me, and also with Jesus seated next to Jesus. We have Jesus' authority and power.

We see in the Bible that Jesus used his authority to access the power of God to nurture and protect the good and to stop and overrule the bad. Jesus overruled the agenda of the devil, including driving out demons. He overruled sickness and injury in bodies when he healed and raised people from the dead. Jesus showed authority over nature when he turned water into wine, he calmed the storm and fed 5,000 people. And Jesus showed authority over people influenced by evil.

Of course, one way in which we access Jesus' authority and power is to pray for God to work through us and in the lives of others. Paul prayed for the believers in Ephesus at the start of his letter that they would know two things:

I pray that your hearts will be flooded with the light so that you can understand the confident hope God has given to those he called God's holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him.' (Ephesians 1:18-19)

'...That our hearts will be flooded with light, so that we have confident hope to know the riches and power that is ours.' Sounds like a good thing to me!

What would your life and my life look like if we really knew the hope, riches and power available to us? Can you imagine what God could do for us in us and through us?

As Paul concludes his prayer for the Ephesians, I pray for you too, that through God's mighty power at work within you, that you may accomplish it infinitely more than you ask or think.

Jo: Well, thank you Pastor Michael for sharing your insights into the power that we have as Christians through Jesus to overcome the spiritual forces working against us in this world. And I hope wherever and whenever you're listening to this, that you have found some encouragement in this too.

Maybe though, after hearing this program, you have more questions than answers, in which case we encourage you to go and talk to a trusted spiritual mentor in your life and to keep exploring what it means to live a life in the hope of God's ultimate power.

So, whether you are struggling with a spiritual battle or another challenge, know that God is with you and he can bring you hope.

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