

"WHEN SURPRISE ATTACKS COME"

A SERMON PREACHED BY VICTOR KNOWLES ON DEC. 7, 2008
 (PEARL HARBOR SUNDAY)
 MT. HOPE CHURCH OF CHRIST
 WEBB CITY, MO.

EDITOR, *ONE BODY*; PRESIDENT, *PEACE ON EARTH MINISTRIES*

Today is Pearl Harbor Day.

Many of you here today were born before...

December 7, 1941 – "A day that will live in infamy."

At 7:55 on the morning of December 7 – a Sunday – the United States Pacific fleet moored in Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Imperial Japanese Air Force.

The surprise attack lasted for two hours and twenty minutes. Nineteen naval vessels – including eight battleships and three destroyers – were sunk or severely damaged. One hundred eighty-eight aircraft were also destroyed or damaged. Worst of all, about 2,400 Americans were killed, including 68 civilians. More than 1,100 were left wounded.

The attack on Pearl Harbor stunned the nation because we were not at war with Imperial Japan, or even Nazi Germany for that matter. All that changed the next day when Congress declared war on Japan.

The lessons of Pearl Harbor are many, but one stands out above all others:

THE LESSON OF PEARL HARBOR:

It is difficult to predict the enemies' strategy and tactics.

The same thing was true on September 11, 2001. Who could have known? Who would have thought that terrorists would fly airliners filled with jet fuel

and live passengers into the World Trade Center and even the Pentagon?

Now, because we know something about the strategy and tactics of the enemy, it seems so wickedly strategic. But then it seemed implausible, even mad.

Whether it is a kamikaze attack on Pearl Harbor or a terrorist attack on the Pentagon, one thing is sure...

Sooner or later the enemy will strike you by surprise.

So how do we prepare for our personal "Pearl Harbor?"

How do we survive a "spiritual Pearl Harbor?"

What do we do...

"When Surprise Attacks Come"

On this day – a day that *still* lives in infamy some 67 years after the attack on Pearl Harbor – may I suggest five things that we need to know and do in order to survive a spiritual Pearl Harbor?

1. Know your enemy.

In the parable of the weeds, Jesus said:

"The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away... The one who sowed the good seed is the Son

of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. . .

(MATTHEW 13:24, 37-39 NIV)

Our enemy is the devil. And what is an enemy?

“One who feels hatred for, fosters harmful designs against, or engages in antagonistic activities against another” (Webster)

Satan’s ultimate strategy is to kill you and take you to hell with him. He will do anything – anything! – to defeat you, discourage you, and destroy you. Our common enemy is not bound by any “code of honor.” Jesus said of him:

“He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (JOHN 8:44 NIV)

The first and most important lesson in spiritual warfare is to know your enemy. He is not your friend, no matter how smooth he talks. He is a fiend, your adversary. Martin Luther’s song “A Mighty Fortress” says all that we need to know:

“For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe; his craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal.”

2. Know that we are in a state of war.

We actually have an advantage in knowing that we are in a state of war. The men who died at Pearl Harbor were not at war with the enemy. But perhaps they should have been on a higher state of alert. Japan felt entitled to the Hawaiian Islands. They wanted the rich resources that were there. They had already invaded Manchuria and even Mainland China.

Similarly, thousands of educated people had read Adolf Hitler’s book *Mien Kampf* but dismissed it as the ravings of a madman. They did not take him seriously. And millions paid dearly for that dismissal. He told them in advance what he was going to do, and he carried out his evil strategy.

Ever since Eden we have been at war with the devil. God declared war on him after the Fall of Man:

“The LORD God said to the serpent. . . I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (GENESIS 3:14, 15 ESV)

Our Lord certainly knew that Satan was His enemy. But do we really believe in a devil and that we are in a state of declared war? Hold on to your hat.

75% of Americans don’t believe Satan is real. Only 34% of Americans believe Jesus was sinless. (JANUARY 2007 BARNAS RESEARCH GROUP SURVEY)

There is no way to win this war if you don’t believe that the devil is real or that Jesus is divine.

3. Don’t be ignorant of his strategies and schemes.

Gathering information and intelligence is one of the most effective ways of preparing for an attack from the enemy. This is why the apostle Paul said. . .

“.. We would not be outwitted by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his designs.” (2 CORINTHIANS 2:11 ESV)

The KJV says, “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.”

The N. T. in Modern English says,

“We don’t want Satan to win any victory here, and well we know his methods!”

The Word of God reveals many of Satan’s strategies, schemes, designs, and devices. There is no excuse in being taken off-guard or by surprise. Go back to the Garden of Eden. How did he attack Adam and Eve? By getting them to question God’s authority, by telling them an outright lie, and by appealing to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life!

He questioned God’s authority. “Did God really say. . .?” (THE TORAH)

“Really?” he asked. “None of the fruit in the garden? God says you mustn’t eat any of it?” (THE LIVING BIBLE)

“Can it really be...?” (THE EMPHASIZED BIBLE: ROTHERHAM)

He told an outright lie. “That’s a lie! the serpent hissed. “You’ll not die!” (THE LIVING BIBLE)

He appealed to a trio of temptations.

The lust of the flesh – “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food...”

The lust of the eyes – “...that it was pleasant to the eyes...”

The pride of life – “...and a tree desirable to make one wise...” (GENESIS 3:6 NKJV)

(This last one was the “killer” for Satan promised the woman, “You will be like God...”)

The devil still teases us with these three tantalizing temptations (1 John 2:16).

Don’t be ignorant of his devices! He makes evil look good. “Greed is good.” He makes good look evil. “Don’t be such a prude!” He works on the emotions. “If it feels good, do it!” He offers immediate gratification. “I want it all, and I want it now.” The first temptation can still be seen on bumper stickers: “Question authority.” His signal sin is what caused his downfall and that of many a Christian – pride. His greatest tool may be discouragement. Do not for a moment, ever, be ignorant of his devices! Read your “defense manual” – the Word of God.

4. Understand that you can’t win this war with defensive weapons only.

What we learned after Pearl Harbor was this: We cannot win with purely or primarily defensive weapons.

Ultimately, we have to engage the enemy in offensive operation in order to destroy the enemy before the enemy can implement their plan of attack.

This is also true in the spiritual realm. Paul was a great spiritual warrior for God. This battle-scarred veteran has good advice for us.

“Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (EPHESIANS 6:11, 12 NIV)

The only offensive weapon that he mentions specifically is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (v. 16). Have you ever noticed that the word “sword” is 4/5ths “word”? We are S Warriors when we go into battle with the Word of God. That is precisely how Jesus defeated Satan in their epoch battle in the wilderness. Three times Jesus countered with “It is written.” We must know the Word of God if we are going to win the battle. As Luther said, “One little word shall fell him.” The next time the devil tries to remind him of your past, you just remind him, from the word of God, about his future!

In verse 18 of Ephesians 6, however, I think Paul hints at a second offensive weapon of warfare.

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (EPHESIANS 6:18 NIV).

Do you remember the battle scene in Mel Gibson’s movie *Braveheart*? Before the foot soldiers march across the field to encounter the enemy, row upon row of archers launch their arrows into the air. The Bible says...

“The truth is that, although of course we lead normal human lives, the battle we are fighting in is on the spiritual level. The very weapons we use are not those of human warfare but powerful in God’s warfare for the destruction of the enemy’s stronghold.” (2 CORINTHIANS 10:4 THE N. T. IN MODERN ENGLISH)

I believe that prayer is that weapon. It has been said that Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint of God on his or her knees. God takes our prayer arrows that we send upward and directs them downward to their intended target – a teenage child facing temptation, a lonely widow fighting discouragement, a weary missionary who is losing heart in the battle far away. Tennyson said...

“More things are wrought [accomplished] by prayer than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice rise like a fountain for me night and day.”

5. Be constantly on high alert.

The enemy is audacious. He attacked the very Son of God. He thinks nothing of attacking the sons and daughters of the Most High – even in broad daylight – just like the sons and daughters of America were attacked at Pearl Harbor. We must constantly be on high alert, on guard against the enemy.

In his Farewell Address to the nation, March 4, 1837, Andrew Jackson said:

“But you must remember, my fellow citizens, that eternal vigilance by the people is the price of liberty...”

My fellow Christians, that is true today as well in the spiritual realm. The liberty we have in Christ came at a high price. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.

The apostle Peter put it this way.

“Be sober. Be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” (1 PETER 5:8, 9 NKJV)

When I was a boy growing up in Boise, Idaho, I was the smallest kid in the class. This emboldened others to pick on me because of my size. But I had a friend, Tony Stapello, an Italian kid, who was tough as nails. No one every tried to pick on me as long as Tony was by my side (when he grew up he became a cop in Boise). Down the street lived the Scharf brothers, Gene and Ted. Gene had green teeth, just like Scut Farkus in the holiday movie *A Christmas Story*. One day I had had enough of Gene’s bullying. While Tony held Ted at bay, I went after Gene, got him down, and pummeled him just like Ralphie took down Scut Farkus in the movie. Except I did it without the cursing! Why do I tell this story? For three reasons...

1. *The devil is not really afraid of you. But he is afraid of the One who stands by your side to defend you.*

2. *Having the presence and power of an Advocate on your side will embolden you to take it to the enemy.*

3. *When you are aligned with Jesus, and resist the devil, he will flee from you.*

A sermon preached by Victor Knowles at Mt. Hope Church of Christ, Webb City, MO on Dec. 7, 2008 (Pearl Harbor Sunday).