

ENEMIES ALL AROUND

The attack of Pearl Harbor took place on December 7, 1941 on a sunny Sunday morning. A minimal contingent of soldiers was on duty at the time. Most offices on the base were closed and many servicemen were on leave for the weekend. New technology, including the new radar mounted on Opana Point, were in place, manned and functioning at the time of the attack. The incoming Japanese attack planes were detected by the radar and reported, but were mistaken for an incoming group of American planes due from the mainland that morning. While on practice maneuvers outside the harbor that morning, an American destroyer spotted a Japanese submarine attempting to sneak into the harbor. The submarine was fired upon, immediately reported — and ignored. Despite these and many other warnings, Pearl Harbor faced great loss that day. The losses and ill preparedness came from one major cause...no one believed it could really happen.

As Christians we need to remember that there is a war that is being waged all around us. God loves us and has a wonderful plan for our lives, but the Bible tells us there is a devil who hates us and has a terrible plan for our lives.

We are continuing in our series on Nehemiah. Last week Steve spoke about the fact that we are all in this together. Today we want to remember that as soon as we stand up and seek to make a difference in the world around us there will be resistance. The devil wants to do everything in his power to stop you from rebuilding your life. He wants to keep you living in rubble.

Nehemiah 4:7 When Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. 8 They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. 9 But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat. 10 Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall." 11 Also our enemies said, "Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work." 12 Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us." 13 Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. 14 After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes." 15 When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his own work. 16 From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah 17 who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, 18 and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me. 19 Then I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. 20 Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!"

The enemy peoples which were living around Jerusalem were not concerned with Israel so long as they stayed as they were. They were a conquered people. As long as Jerusalem remained a heap of rubble, it was no real threat. Even when they rebuilt the temple it was of no concern. They could continue to worship as long as the walls around Jerusalem which protected the city remained rubble.

It was not until the people got together and began to rebuild the wall their enemies took note of what was happening. Then they became a target.

I used to enjoy playing risk. The problem was that person who began to win was picked on the most. The devil does not mind what we do behind the closed doors of the church. He doesn't resist the individual or the church that stays with the status quo. We can worship and do our programs and he is not concerned. It is when the church stands up and starts to make an impact on it's community and the world that the devil begins to take notice and come against it.

Oil was discovered on some Oklahoma property belonging to an elderly Indian. All his life he had been poverty stricken, just eking out a living. But the discovery of oil had suddenly made him a very wealthy man. The first thing he bought was a very big Cadillac. He would dress up in his new clothes and everyday he would take his Cadillac into the hot dusty little town nearby. He wanted to see everyone and he wanted everyone to see him. He was a friendly old soul so he would ride through town in all directions to wave at all the people as he rolled by. Interesting enough, he never ran into anybody nor into anything. The reason for this was that directly in front of that big beautiful car was two horses harnessed to it and pulling it. There was nothing wrong with the car's engine. It was because the old Indian had never learned to drive it. He had never learned how to insert the key into the ignition switch and turn it on. Under the hood was 400 plus horsepower ready, willing and raring to go, but the old Indian was content to use the two horsepower hooked to the front of the car.

The devil gets really happy when he can keep the believer chugging along in their Christian life on a two horse power faith level. At that rate, the spiritual progress is slowed down to a crawl, and this is what the devil is after in his warfare with us.

Over the last few years we have had a large number of people who were baptized in this church. One of the things that always tell people who are getting baptized is that they can expect resistance in the coming days. Whenever you make the decision to stand up for Jesus you become a target. I have often said when facing severe resistance in an area of ministry that it must be a worthwhile direction since the devil is trying so hard to stop it.

How are we as individuals and the church ready to come against the devil when he attacks?

1. Overcoming Discouragement (10-11) – keeps us from finishing

The Devil had a garage sale and offered all the tools of his trade to anyone who would pay their price. They were spread out on the table and each one labeled. Hatred, malice, envy, despair, sickness, sensuality -- all the weapons that everyone knows so well. But off to one side lay a harmless looking wood-shaped instrument marked "discouragement." It was old and worn looking but it was priced far above all the rest. When asked the reason why, the Devil replied, "Because I can use this one so much more easily than the others. No one knows that it belongs to me, so with it I can open doors that are tightly bolted against the others. Once I get inside I can use any tool that suits me best."

Often the first thing the devil does is to attack us through discouragement. The Israelites faced fatigue and feared the enemy at several different levels:

a. There is so much rubble (the task is too big) – Put yourself in their shoes. The Israelites had worked long and hard and still there was so much work to be done. Likewise the task before us may look enormous at times. You look at the situation and grow discouraged – there is nothing I can do!

- b. The strength of the laborers is giving out (we are not strong enough) - The workers were growing tired and their strength was beginning to give out on them. There are times when we can grow tired in service. You are so exhausted that you just want to throw in the towel.
- c. They will kill us and put an end to the work (the enemy is too strong) - the people were afraid that the enemy would attack and they would not be strong enough to resist. Many feel that they have tried to do this or that but have failed so they should stop trying.

Does this sound familiar? I was not around when they built this building that we are now sitting in. I do know that, while most people were excited to build, that there were also many that were against the plan and that actually left the church because of the decision to build. They were saying things like “the plan is just too big, who needs a building that can seat so many people.” Others said “we just do not have enough resources for a building this large. The cost is too much.” Still others said “interest rates are just too high right now and banks do not want to lend to churches.”

Have you ever watched the show survivor? You often see that those who lay low and don't make waves often go the distance. God is calling us to do more than just survive. He wants us to thrive.

As long as the devil can keep us terrified of thinking, he will always limit the work of God in our souls. - Oswald Chambers

When the 12 spies went out to view the promise land they brought back the report that even though the land was wonderful there were giants in the land. Each of us face “giants” in our own lives – situations that are overwhelming. They stand in the way of us receiving the promise God has for us.

Num 13:33 We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

The real issue is not the size of the enemy but the strength of our God. The people of Israel saw themselves as grasshoppers. Because they saw themselves that way other people saw them that way as well. They failed because they had a grasshopper mentality and not God's perspective.

I love the song Voice of Truth by Casting Crowns:

Oh, what I would do to have the kind of strength it takes
 To stand before a giant with just a sling and a stone
 Surrounded by the sound of a thousand warriors
 shaking in their armor Wishing they'd have had the strength to stand

But the giant's calling out my name and he laughs at me
 Reminding me of all the times I've tried before and failed
 The giant keeps on telling me time and time again
 "Boy you'll never win, you'll never win."

But the voice of truth tells me a different story
 the Voice of truth says "do not be afraid!"
 and the Voice of truth says "this is for My glory"

Out of all the voices calling out to me
I will choose to listen and believe the Voice of truth

What do you do when you grow discouraged? What helps you? Remember the story when David and his men returned home from combat only to find their town had been destroyed and their wives and children had been taken away:

1 Sam 30:4 So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep... 6 David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God.

In the KJV it says that David "Encouraged himself" in the lord. He listened to the voice of truth, and refused to give in to discouragement.

Yes we will face giants in our lives. We will face situations that seem impossible. Reaching our community seems impossible let alone reaching the whole world. Yet we know that it happens because we have read the back of the Bible. We are not strong enough but we know that "when we are weak God is strong". God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. Yes the enemy is strong but "Greater is He that is within us that he that is in the world". God's power is far greater than anything we could face in the world.

A British soldier in WWI lost heart for battle and deserted. Trying to reach the coast for a boat to England, he ended up wandering in the pitch black night, hopelessly lost. In the darkness he came across what he thought was a signpost. He climbed it so that he could read it. As he reached the top of the pole, he struck a match to see and found himself looking squarely into the face of Jesus Christ. He realized that, rather than running into a signpost, he had climbed a roadside crucifix. Brown later wrote, "Then he remembered the One who had died for him -- who had endured -- who had never turned back. The next morning the soldier was back in the trenches. " Discouragement keeps us from finishing...

2. Overcoming Fear (12-15) – keeps us from starting

It says in verse 12 "Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, 'Wherever you turn, they will attack us.'" When the people heard that the enemy was ready to attack they stopped working on the wall. They were afraid. Fear always keeps us from doing the work that God wants. We conquer fear when we understand the devil's plans.

The ancient sport of falconry employed trained hawks in the chase of wild game. When the hawk was allowed to fly, it often rose too high for human eyes to see it against the blue sky. It was therefore not uncommon to carry a small caged bird called a shrike. The hunter could then easily tell where his hawk was located by watching the antics of the little creature in front of him, for it instinctively feared the falcon and always cocked its head to keep it in view.

When the enemy heard that Israel knew their plans they stopped the attack. The people returned to the wall to work after the enemy knew that it's plan had been found out. Likewise we need to know the plans of the devil and resist him at every point he would seek to destroy. This can be general and specific. There are some tactics which the devil uses all the time on everyone. There are sometimes also specific areas of weakness which the devil will attack you at. You need to be especially watchful at those points.

I have said this before, but one of the hardest things I had to adjust to when we moved home from Kuwait was the self-reliance of the North American churches. In Kuwait there was always some emergency or problem that threatened the very survival of the church. That meant that we needed to pray often. When I look at most churches in Canada, they can easily operate on their own resources. If the Holy Spirit checked out of most churches in Canada they could go on completely fine without Him.

When was the last time we as a church tried something really big? When was the last time we attempted something so big that it made us scared and we said that if God does not show up we are in big trouble? We do not have a mortgage as a church. Statistics show that in the average Evangelical Canadian church people give about 3%. I know that there are people in this church that give sacrificially, that give a lot more than that. I also know that means there are a lot of people who give less.

2 Cor 2:9 The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything.
10 If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven -- if there was anything to forgive -- I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, 11 in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

1Pe 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

The devil may go about like a lion, but always remember that he is a caged lion. He can only hurt you if you let him. If you go to a zoo and walk by the lion's den it can roar and startle you but it cannot hurt you unless you allow it to. God is infinitely stronger than all the power of the enemy. He is creator, the devil is creation.

We need to be like the 84 year old grandmother who fiercely maintained her independence and lived alone in the old family home. Her 4 children lived in the same town, but she rarely called them except in emergencies. It was with some apprehension, therefore, that one of her sons drove to her house one morning in answer to her phone call. When he arrived she said she suspected that there was a burglar in her bedroom closet, since she had heard noises in there the night before. "Why didn't you call me last night?" he exclaimed. "Well," she replied, it was late and I hated to bother you, so I just nailed the closet shut and went to bed." That's the kind of attitude a Christian can have when faced with the impossible. Nail the door of fear shut and go to bed in calm assurance.

3. Overcoming Deception (vs. 16-23) – being ready to fight

The strategy that Israel used is very interesting. They set up soldiers to keep watch over the people. Everyone was armed - even while they were working. The trumpet sounder stayed with the leader so that when the trumpet sounded everyone would join the fight at that specific area.

What can we learn from this? First, we need prayer warriors. God has given different gifts to everyone in the body. If your gift is prayer than PRAY! Pray specifically for protection for the leaders of the church.

Secondly, it is essential that every child of God be armed as they go about their work. This means that you should always be prepared to resist the enemy. It is not the job of the pastor or a select few in the church but the job of EVERYONE to keep watch and be ready to fight. This involves putting on the full armor of God. It also means growing in you knowledge and understanding of God's word.

In Saudi Arabia today, millions of Muslims are observing the festival of Eid al-Adha. In this festival, Muslim pilgrims will pass 3 pillars. These pillars represent the Devil. All of the pilgrims there will take turns throwing stones at those pillars. In the past 20 years, over 3200 Muslims have been killed in accidents, while trying to throw stones at those pillars. May I tell you that the battle we are engaged in will take more than throwing stones at pillars, but it will be costly as well. It will require sacrifice, commitment, prayer, and spiritual warfare.

Thirdly, it means listening to the leadership. Everyone did not have a trumpet – it stayed with the leader. This implies trust. The people were willing to trust that their leader knew best where to attack. The people could have just ignored the trumpet when it sounded. They could have thought “who cares what is happening over there, my focus is on what I am working on here”. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and a city is only as safe as its weakest part of the wall. When the trumpet blew it meant that everyone was to drop what they were doing and join in the point of greatest conflict.

It says in this passage that “the work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall”. That could also describe us as a church. We have lots of different areas of ministry and most of the time we only see our own little piece of the overall work. Leadership provides important oversight for the entire ministry.

One of the issues churches often face is trusting in their leadership. They hear the trumpet but decide their issue is of greater importance. Mennonite churches have a distrust of authority so often as churches grow they split because people are not willing to give up their say and trust the leadership to move forward.

We know that the devil will come against the church - especially when the church steps out to make a difference in the world. We need to be actively involved in watching our own hearts as we seek to serve because we will become targets.

Australia has two animals pictured on their Coat of Arms. They are an Emu and a Kangaroo. These are some strange choices to those who don't know why they are there. The Emu is nothing but a big, dumb bird and a kangaroo just looks funny while it hops along to escape danger. But there's more to it than that. You see, these two animals have a very special characteristic that isn't found in any other species. It is impossible for them to move backwards. An Emu has 3 toes and they are all on the front of its foot. If he tries to move backward, he falls down. A kangaroo can't move backwards because its long and heavy tail gets in the way and trips him up. So they both must move forward all the time. They were picked to symbolize Australia as a nation that will never fall back but keep moving on against all odds.