

## **Facing the Enemy**

In the movie based on historical events in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, *Braveheart*, we are introduced to one William Wallace. Scotland is under the rule of the brutish English king, Edward I. Because of the oppressive rule of the English, a freedom movement develops in Scotland and some of the organizers of the rebellion try to get Wallace to join them. He's not interested. He just wants to be left alone to farm and raise a family in peace.

But when his new bride, whom he has married secretly, is harassed and eventually murdered by English soldiers, Wallace realizes that pacifism is not an option. He joins the fight and in fact, becomes the leader of the rebellion. Fighting is not about revenge for Wallace, it's about building a barrier to evil. And so as they stand before the overwhelming force of the mighty English army, Wallace says to his band of brothers, "I am William Wallace. And I see here a whole army of my countrymen..." I've got a better idea. Let's listen to Mel Gibson do this:

[*Braveheart* clip 1:36 min.]

Some people think that if you're truly spiritual, you will be categorically opposed to any form of war. If that were true, then why would Jesus, through the apostle Paul, instruct us to "put on the full armor of God"? (Eph. 6:11) Or why would he also say that we are to fight with weapons that "have divine power to demolish strongholds"? (II Cor. 10:4)

No, mature followers of Christ realize that there is an enemy who is out to destroy not only us but also those we love and he will not leave us alone if we nicely say "please." We may not want to, but we have no choice. We're going to have to fight him.

The Book of Judges records dark days in Israel's history. Joshua had led the people into the Land of Promise and under his leadership they won many victories. But chapters 1 and 2 of Judges show us the period after Joshua died. We see...

### **I. Israel's Slow Descent Into Disobedience.**

If you saw news headlines like these, what would you think?

"Family Feud leaves 69 Dead!"

"Government Official Caught in 'Sexual Escapade'"

"Sex Trafficking Scheme Involves Hundreds of Young Women"

"Judge says, 'Highway Travelers No Longer Safe.'"

Could these events have taken place in our country? Probably. We've all seen news reports similar to these, right? Well, these are all real stories but not from America, they're from the Book of Judges. But this is not the Israel under Joshua's leadership. Judges 2:7 says:

**The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel.**

So, there was great obedience to the LORD while Joshua was their leader. And just how, exactly, did he pull that off? Did Joshua have secret service agents spying on the people to be able to catch them disobeying God and then punish the moral offenders?

No, actually, the atmosphere under Joshua's reign was one of radical freedom. Joshua spoke truth to the people, called on them to choose freely whom they would serve and modeled his own choice before them. Here's an example of how Joshua spoke to the people:

**Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness... But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.** (Josh. 24:14, 15)

Under this style of leadership, freedom combined with a strong personal example, the nation flourished. Why? Because they chose to submit to God:

**Then the people answered, (Joshua) "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! ...We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God."** (Josh. 24:16, 18b)

So, what happened in the period of the Judges? Judges 2:10 and 11 says:

**After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals.**

How could this have happened? Well, what does it say? It says, "...a generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel." Who's responsible for this lack of knowledge? Well, it had to be the parents, right? Now, I want to be clear about something: God's Word tells us what is and what isn't the responsibility of parents when it comes to faith issues. Deut. 6 says that it IS the parents' responsibility to TELL the next generation about the LORD and to MODEL a life of faith before their children. They must tell it, they must live it – just like Joshua did. It is NOT the parents' responsibility what the children do with that information and with that modeling. Deut. 24:16:

**Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin.**

Apparently, the generation of parents after Joshua did not fulfill their responsibilities – they didn't tell and they didn't live a life of faith. But that didn't excuse the children, because we're all responsible for our own lives.

Basically, this means that God's not interested in our excuses. "If I'd had a better father, I'd be a better Christian." Or, "Oh man, I feel so guilty! I told my kids about Jesus and tried to live out my faith before them, but they've all abandoned the faith. What went wrong?" You are not a helpless victim nor are you are the cause of someone else's bad choices. "*Each is to die for his own sin.*" Stop looking out the window. Just clean up your own house. God's truth told and lived in an environment of freedom is the best environment for growing healthy souls. But secondly, we must ask...

## **II. What About the Enemy?**

Okay, that's a legitimate question. What do we do about the enemy? We can't ignore him and hope for the best. Neville Chamberlin is the poster child for how NOT to deal with an enemy. He and Hitler signed a non-aggression pact which wasn't worth the paper it was printed on. Jesus made it clear that we should never trust Satan because he is a liar. Enemies who have given themselves to evil cannot be ignored and they cannot be trusted. They must be fought.

God told Israel that they were going to have to fight their way into the land. He wasn't going to do all the work for them. Why would God want his people to fight? Part of the reason is that there are lessons to learn and maturity that only comes through conflict. In Ps. 119, the writer talks about the "advantages" of conflict and affliction. Listen:

**I know, O LORD, that your laws are righteous,  
and in faithfulness you have afflicted me.  
...help me, for men persecute me without cause.  
They almost wiped me from the earth,  
but I have not forsaken your precepts.  
If your law had not been my delight,  
I would have perished in my affliction.  
I will never forget your precepts,  
for by them you have preserved my life.** (Ps. 119:75, 86, 87, 92,93)

You see, there are two roads we can take when we come face to face with the enemy of our souls. One road is the Road of Devastation. The first stop on this road is the Place of Accommodation. Instead of fighting the enemy, we accommodate the enemy – we give evil a place to live. Six tribes of Israel did this in the Land of Promise. God commanded them to completely wipe out the evil nation that lived there. They removed most of them, but not all of them. (Judges 1:21, 27-36)

We can do this personally. When we became Christians, we changed so much. God helped us bring many things under His control. Our language is different, our temper is more under control, we don't gossip nearly as much as we used to. But did we leave room for some of it to remain? We heard that voice say,

"Wow! You've improved so much! You should be so proud of yourself. But hey, nobody's perfect! God can't expect you to get rid of ALL your bad habits! Don't worry about it. He'll forgive you."

That's not the voice of God. That's the voice of the enemy. Instead of fighting, we're accommodating his presence. Consciously giving him space is a bad idea.

The second stop is the Place of Imitation. After we've accommodated evil for a while, we eventually start to imitate evil. If you don't eliminate, you'll eventually imitate. I know how susceptible my own heart is to frequently repeated messages or viewed actions – I start to imitate them. Why are commercials repeated on the radio over and over and over again? Because those who create them know that we will imitate them, we'll want what the people in the commercial want. It's just our nature. We're social creatures!

If it's a good thing to imitate – great! But what if it isn't? The video gaming industry can produce all the psychological studies they want, but all I know is that the shooters at Columbine, Virginia Tech, Arizona and Newtown, Connecticut, were all heavy, heavy users of the most violent shooter video games. Eph. 4:27 says:

### **...and do not give the devil a foothold.**

The Greek word here literally means, “*don’t give the devil a place.*” Have you given him a “place” in your life? You’ve got to get him out. If you don’t eliminate, you’ll eventually imitate.

The last stop on the Road to Devastation is the Place of Capitulation. To capitulate means “to surrender unconditionally,” to stop fighting all together. This is the goal of war, to get your opponent to stop fighting, to surrender. The great Chinese war general and strategist, Sun Tzu, said that the object of war is to impose your will on your enemy and “the supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.” This is what the Devil wants to accomplish with all Christians! He knows he can’t prevent you from going to heaven, but here on this earth he desperately wants to get you to stop fighting him so that he can enslave more souls!

This is the Road to Devastation: accommodate, imitate, capitulate. This is the road the Israelites took and it ended with a collapsed society. Believe me, we don’t want to go there but we’ll end up there if we aren’t willing to fight! There’s a great song sung by the old gospel group, *Harvest*. The chorus says:

*Are we walking into the enemy’s camp, laying our weapons down  
Shedding our armor as we go, leaving it on the ground  
We’ve got to be strong in the Power of His Might, prove to the enemy  
We are the army of the LORD and we’ve won the victory. <sup>i</sup>*

So, there is another road. It’s...

### **III. The Road to Salvation**

Synonyms of “devastate” are *destroy, ravage, tear down*. Synonyms of “salvation” are *reinstate, repair, raise*. If we have to go to war, we must know, “What are we fighting for? What do we hope to accomplish?” If we can’t answer that question, we have no hope of maintaining good morale among the troops. So, what was Israel fighting for?

When the Israelites fought their way into the Land of Promise, they were fighting for two reasons. They were fighting to bring honor to the Name of Yahweh and they were fighting for their inheritance, the Land of Promise. God had told them through Moses that He wanted a place for His Temple to be built because the Temple was where His Spirit would exist and through the Temple the way for people to have a friendship with God would be symbolized. So, the Israelites were fighting to secure a place for His Name.

But secondly, they were fighting for their inheritance because it symbolized that they belonged to God. This was His land and as part of the land, they were His people. I’m sure that, for the Israelites, fighting for God’s land and their part in it was very motivational. But what are WE fighting for?

We’re fighting for the same things. We’re fighting for God’s Name to be recognized and honored in this world and we’re fighting for our inheritance. What’s our inheritance? As we said last week, it’s our relationship with Christ. He is our inheritance.

But let me make an important point here. What do I mean when I say “we; we’re fighting for our inheritance”? Do I mean Christians? I mean all people and I mean Christians. Let me explain. First, who is the enemy? The enemy is Satan and all his demons, what Paul calls *rulers... authorities... powers of this dark world...*

(Eph. 6:12) People, especially non-Christians are not the enemy. They are the POWs of this war. What are we fighting for? We're fighting to honor the Name of God by offering salvation to all people on earth. We want to offer them the opportunity to be "reinstated" into God's family, to be rescued from their enslavement to sin, to be raised up to life in Christ instead of living under the power and addictions of the Evil One. We are fighting to honor the Name of Jesus and to set the prisoner free. Is that enough reason for you to fight?

Most of you know the storyline to the movie, *Saving Private Ryan*. A private named Ryan is one of four brothers in combat in WWII. All his other brothers have been killed, so Army Headquarters sends a team of Army Rangers to bring Private Ryan back home so that his mother isn't devastated by losing all her sons.

Tom Allen is a former Army Ranger. He says that he was so proud watching that film, until it got to the last minute of the movie where he says, "I was horrified." Here's why he was so upset. At the end of the movie, the Army Rangers find Private Ryan and try to get him to leave combat, but he won't do it because his unit is preparing for a huge battle and he refuses to leave his friends behind. So, the Rangers stay to fight that battle with Private Ryan. At the very end, everyone in his unit is wounded and dying, except Private Ryan. Tom Hanks, who plays one of the Rangers who is dying, leans over to Ryan and whispers two words, "Earn this." That's what horrified Tom Allen, the former Ranger. He says:

The reason that made me angry is no Ranger would ever say, "Earn this."

Why? Because the Ranger motto for 200 years has not been "Earn this." The Ranger motto... has been *Sua sponte*, "I chose this." I volunteered for this.

So, when Private Ryan bent down, if Tom Hanks were really a Ranger he would have said, "Sua sponte, I chose this. This is free. You don't pay anything for this. I give up my life for you. That's my job." <sup>ii</sup>

We are followers of Jesus Christ. When we see Him hanging on the cross, we do not hear, "Earn this." What we hear is, "I volunteered for this. I chose this." As His followers, that's what we need to say to lost people in this world. Our warfare is not physical warfare, but it could have physical or emotional or psychological impact. We could be wounded in our rescue efforts. But the one thing we must not do is capitulate to the enemy. We must not stop fighting. We must not surrender and run to safety. We'll have all eternity to live in safety!! That's not our assignment now. We are called to lift high His name and point as many people as we can toward the Road of Salvation. We cannot save, that's the Holy Spirit's work. But we can "tell" and we can "model." And we can experience the great privilege of a Judge.

**Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived. (Judges 2:18)**

As we will see in the weeks ahead, these judges were normal, imperfect men and women, just like you and me. But God used them to "save people from their enemies." If you will say "yes" to this mission, for all eternity you could be known as someone that God used to bring people to salvation. That honor will be yours, if you will just say, "Yes!" Yes, yes; say it today! Let's pray...

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<sup>i</sup> Harvest Album, *Send Us To the World*,” song: “The Army of the Lord,” words by Jerry Williams, 1983

<sup>ii</sup> Preaching Today, “Jesus Chose the Cross,” 4/11/2000