

En Garde

Sermon.

Good Morning/Afternoon! Open your Bibles this morning to 1 Peter chapter 5. While you're getting there...if you didn't happen to get a bulletin this morning and would like a note page to follow along with the message, if you'll just raise your hand, one of the ushers will bring you one.

1 Peter chapter 5...you there yet? Peter is wrapping up his letter to the church in this last chapter, and here is what he says in verses 6-11 - *⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you. ⁸Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. ⁹Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world.*

¹⁰The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you after you have suffered a little while. ¹¹To him be dominion forever. Amen.

As we wrapped up our series on the parables a couple weeks ago with the Wheat and the Tares, we read in Matthew 13, verses 24-28:

...“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵But while people were sleeping, his enemy came, sowed weeds among the wheat, and left. ²⁶When the plants sprouted and produced grain, then the weeds also appeared. ²⁷The landowner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Master, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Then where did the weeds come from?’

²⁸“‘An enemy did this,’ he told them.

I told you a couple weeks ago that there was a whole ‘nother sermon in there about verse 25: *But while people were sleeping, his enemy came, sowed weeds among the wheat, and left.* Well guess what today is? Today is the day you get that message I promised ya.

As Jesus explains the parable in Matthew 13 verses 36-39, every single one seems to play a part except the workers...the servants that fell asleep...thereby allowing the enemy to do his work.

I'm certainly not going to try to explain what Christ didn't...I'm not going to present some great revelation of who or what these characters represent in the parable...I simply want to point out that in the story, they slept, and let that fact lead to this question: WHY?

As I pointed out in the message on this parable, an enemy sowing tares over good seed was such a common and devastating practice that the Romans outlawed it, so certainly the workers would have been aware that if they didn't keep watch, an enemy could try to ruin the harvest.

If they were aware of the possibility, wouldn't they have been guarding against it? Maybe they had been guarding against it for several nights, and finally the guy that was up for duty that night just figured there hadn't been any threat so far, what would it hurt if he just caught a couple of Z's on this night? Again, Jesus just doesn't tell us that part.

So I'm going to leave that there, but use the parable in Matthew 13 as a jumping-off point to help illustrate Peter's exhortation to the church in not just the conclusion of his letter...if we look at 1 Peter, being alert is something that he mentions repeatedly.

Chapter 1 verse 13 reads: *¹³Therefore, with your minds ready for action, be sober-minded and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Chapter 4 verse 7: *The end of all things is near; therefore, be alert and sober-minded for prayer.*

These warnings are not unique to Peter's writing, Paul also writes of the need to be alert, strong and courageous in his letters to Ephesus, Corinth and Colossae. Jesus himself, sometimes through the use of parables, told the apostles to be prepared for his promised return.

Jesus speaking in **Luke 21:34-36** - ³⁴*“Be on your guard, so that your minds are not dulled from carousing, drunkenness, and worries of life, or that day will come on you unexpectedly ³⁵like a trap. For it will come on all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶But be alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place and to stand before the Son of Man.”*

So there are many things that we as Disciples of Christ are to avoid in order that we may remain alert. We should be focused on preparing ourselves for the return of Jesus, and be on guard against the things of this world that would keep us from being prepared.

But today I want to specifically address 1 Peter 5:8; as important as the things that we should avoid are, I want to examine the source of those things, and dig into who...Peter tells us to guard against. Let's read that again: ⁸Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour.

First commissioned in 1941, U.S. Marine Corps Lt Col Jeff Cooper served in World War II and the Korean War. Following the end of the Korean War, he returned to college and earned his Master's degree in history, spent some time as a high school and community college teacher, then in 1976 founded the American Pistol Institute, which is now the Gunsite Academy. Some of you might be familiar with this renowned firearms training facility.

In his book *Principles of Personal Defense*, Col Cooper stated that the most important means of surviving a lethal confrontation is neither the weapon nor the martial skills of the combatant. The primary tool is the combat mindset.

He described the combat mindset using a color code, one that law enforcement, military and firearms instructors still use today. Here is the basic table. If you're interested at all in personal security or everyday firearms carry, I encourage you to take the time to learn and put into practice Col Cooper's principles.

Some of you know where I'm going with this, and some of you are still wondering what any of this has to do with a Sunday morning sermon. Let me

read to you from Col Cooper's comments on the color code: *If you are in Condition White, you are unaware and unprepared. Sadly, the majority of the American public perpetually operates in this condition. If attacked in Condition White, the only thing that may save you is the inadequacy of your attacker. You will probably die unless your adversary is totally inept.*

What causes someone to be in Condition White? If you're sleeping, well sure. But outside of that...physical or mental fatigue, stress, under the influence of drugs or alcohol, daydreaming, texting, checking email or websurfing on your phone while walking or driving...all these things decrease your mental preparation and can cause you to become a victim to violence.

Cooper says the only time you should allow yourself to be in Condition White is if you are inside your home, the doors are locked, the alarm is on and there is no immediate danger. Unless you live in Chicago. Then...move.

Suffice it to say, Condition White is an undesirable state. Especially when it comes to spiritual readiness! Peter makes it clear that if we simply wander about unaware, we are going to get attacked. Readiness is a deterrent to being attacked. An enemy will always choose an easier target.

So what do we do with all this? Just like we have tools to use in the fight against Satan...read Ephesians 6...he has tools and strategies to use against us. We need to study up on them, and stay awake and aware.

Violence against Christians throughout the world today is on the rise. Granted, it's nothing compared to historical accounts of Christian persecution, but it is noticeable. Do we chalk this up to the influence of our enemy? Naturally we would. Political decisions are being made globally, and in this country as well, that affect Christians negatively. We recognize these types of things fairly readily as attacks, don't we? But not every attack is so obvious, especially not in the day to day life of the American Christian.

The Devil sometimes disguises his attacks to seem like something else...even blessings! Take for example a couple that is heavily involved in ministry in the local community. As money gets tight, they continue to pray for a

change in their employment, and within the same year, both of them receive promotions at work.

Prayers answered, right?! The change means an increase in both pay and responsibility, and soon things are so hectic that between the demands of jobs and family...and not a little bit due to the fact that more money is available to go out and do "fun stuff", ministry takes a back seat.

Did Satan have to destroy them with illnesses or a family tragedy or the loss of a job to get them to leave behind the work of the Kingdom? Nope...just the opposite! He just had to disguise busy-ness as a blessing and rob their time from them, and all the people they might have built relationships with...might have introduced to Jesus...

How many of us are just too busy to...

"I know the church needs help, and I would serve, but by the time Sunday gets here I just need a day of rest."

"I know I should read the Bible, but as soon as my feet hit the floor in the morning it's just go-go-go until bed time...There's just no time."

"I know I should take time to pray, but come on! I've got the things I want to pray about, the things that my friends ask me to pray for, then there's the kids' bed-time, and my wife and I can't ever seem to get a spare moment to pray together...I'm trying, doesn't that count for something?"

"I know there are places in the city where they need a hand to care for people, but when do I get some "me-time"? Can't I just write 'em a check?"

"I know I should go visit that friend that's been sick, that just lost a family member...but stuff like that just hurts my heart...it drains me."

If you think I'm picking on you, I'm not. I deal with busy-ness all the time. So do a lot of other people I talk to. The thing to remember is this: just because

you're busy, you may not necessarily be busy at doing the things God has asked you to be busy at.

What other ways does the enemy have to devour us? We talked a bit about disguising attacks, but how about infiltration?

I read a true story of soldiers stationed on Leyte in the Philippines during WWII. Although the region was secure, sometimes the enemy tried to infiltrate their food storage area. One such adversary, dressed in Army issue clothing, had worked himself into the noontime chow line. But the camp cook spotted him, pulled a pistol from under the serving table and yelled for the MPs to come and arrest the man.

After it was all over, the other soldiers asked the cook how he knew the man wasn't one of them. "I figured it wasn't one of you guys," said the cook, "'cause he was coming back for seconds."

That enemy soldier "looked" like the other GI's...He was dressed like them, he walked like them, he behaved like them. But something gave him away... something made him stand out to anyone that was paying attention.

Our enemy sends infiltrators among us as well. Oh, they may talk the talk, and they may even walk the walk...but something will give them away if you're paying attention.

A very good...and very married...friend of mine knows exactly how this looks. He got involved with a woman that he'd met through his job...get this...because she prayed with him. That was something that he had been missing in his relationship with his wife; they just never prayed together.

In getting to know this other woman, he noted that they were from similar religious backgrounds, had grown up in the same type of family environment, everything just seemed to click. And it was very attractive to him. To the point that he was getting ready to leave his wife and family to pursue this relationship.

Finally, the Holy Spirit got hold of his heart just hours before he was set to leave and let him know what was up. When I met with him later, and he ran through events with me, first, I was upset that he never reached out before things got so involved, and second, I asked him how he couldn't see that this girl was an infiltrator! You're going to read scripture and pray with a guy that you're leading away from his marriage and family? YES!

These are the types of things that we can't see coming. Just like that impostor that everyone except one man was blind to, Satan will send "Godly" people into your camp to dismantle you from within and destroy your heart and life and your ability to continue to serve God. It happens all the time.

⁸Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour.

The Devil disguises, he infiltrates and he distracts. This has been a long week for me. Not because of anything really earth-shattering, but just for this reason right here. Distraction.

While I was preparing, I ran across a video of a message on another area I've been studying, then that led to another one. This person stopped by, that person called...next thing you know, it's Saturday and I'm still working.

You know how you catch wild pigs? You find a suitable place in the woods and toss a pile of corn on the ground. The pigs find it and begin to come every day to eat the free corn. When they are used to coming every day, you put a fence down one side of the place where they are used to coming.

At first they'll stay away because the fence is something new, but once they get used to the fence, they begin to eat the corn again and you put up another side of the fence. Then they get used to that and start to eat again. You continue until you have all four sides of the fence up with a gate in the last side.

The pigs, to get to the free corn, will find the gate opening and once they're all inside, you slam the gate on them and catch the whole herd. Suddenly the wild pigs have lost their freedom. They run around and around inside the fence,

looking for a way out until one of them finds the pile of corn in the middle of the pen and figures it might as well eat.

Pretty soon all of them go back to eating the free corn. They are so used to it that they have forgotten how to forage in the woods for themselves, so they accept their captivity.

The enemy of the Gospel, Satan himself, often uses this tactic. If he can, he will distract us long enough to hem us in and then we lose our freedom and our effectiveness for Christ. He gets us thinking about the free corn instead of thinking about the freedom that we have in Christ.

And distractions come in all flavors...in all circumstances. Have you ever gotten distracted when you start to spend time in prayer? You just get into it and suddenly your mind is off and running. In Colossians 4:2 Paul tells them to *Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving*. I'm guessing he knew this to be a problem, and he warns against it. Distraction is the exact opposite of alertness.

No matter how well-trained you may be in scripture, no matter how educated, no matter how gifted...if you are distracted, un-alert to what's going on around you...if you're living your life in Condition White...you're going to miss something important that needs to be done. Someone is going to need a kind word, or a prayer, or a meal...and you're simply going to walk on by because your enemy has you thinking about something else.

Last one. And I know more than one of you in this room today needs to hear this. This enemy that seeks to devour you is...a...liar.

In John chapter 8 we read about group of Jews that argue with Jesus about who he said he was, and Jesus says in verses 42-47: *...“If God were your Father, you would love me, because I came from God and I am here. For I didn't come on my own, but he sent me. ⁴³Why don't you understand what I say? Because you cannot listen to my word.*

⁴⁴You are of your father the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies.

⁴⁵Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶Who among you can convict me of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? ⁴⁷The one who is from God listens to God's words. This is why you don't listen, because you are not from God."

Well, that's pretty harsh, isn't it? But Jesus makes it clear to these men that if they truly were "of God", they would recognize him as the one that God sent. They can't recognize him, because they have murder in their hearts, and their minds are clouded by lies.

Not only does Jesus tell them who they are in this passage, he tells us who Satan is... *he is a liar and the father of lies*. And it is this same enemy that will slide in alongside you and whisper in your ear the lies that crush your spirit. Maybe he's disguised himself as something you need... "You don't need to go on that mission trip, you need to stay home and rest."

Maybe he's infiltrated a relationship you hold dear and where you thought you were both on the same page, now there's conflict...and you wonder what you did wrong.

Maybe he's distracted you and trapped you into a situation that you can't see a way out of and you're about to lose hope and just give in...give up your freedom.

Lies. "You're not good enough." "God could never love you!" "You're too soft, you're too weak, you're not pretty, you're not smart"

LIES! It makes me mad just thinking about it! I know people that are hearing these lies and it's causing them great pain. I can see they're lies, but they seem real to them! How many lives are destroyed or lost every day because the lies that the enemy feeds them finally overwhelm them...

And here's the biggest lie of all. When Satan looks at you right in the face and convinces you that he's weak and powerless.

Any zoo-lovers in here? We came to Alaska in late 2000 and I love it here, but let's face it...our zoo isn't really the big draw of say Atlanta or San Diego. I spent a little time this week trying to find a video of a roaring lion to kind of drive home the imagery of a big cat striking fear into the heart of anything in listening range, but what I found mostly was zoo footage. Here's one of them:

VIDEO 1

Not really fearsome.....the glass is so thick that these kids can't even hear the roar of the lion on the other side. They're laughing, taking pictures, swatting at the glass, ridiculing what is clearly a very angry big cat. Here's another:

VIDEO 2

The casualness of this guy, right? He's got his big stick, the lion is behind a steel cage. At the end there...not sure if you heard it...he throws out a comment about the lion always breaking his teeth off on the cage when he rushes it like that. Dude, if that alone doesn't tell you that this isn't a tame lion, I don't know what. Last one:

VIDEO 3

That is one ticked-off kitty. And that one...you can hear. Did you feel the threat in the rumble of that growl? The people that are filming this beast are trusting in that thin electrical wire and what doesn't seem to be a very substantial metal cage to keep it at bay. Now, imagine for a moment that the cage is suddenly just...gone...and this thickly muscled ball of anger is unrestrained. How long do you think they have to live?

This is the Satan that we're warned of. Church, don't make the mistake for a second in believing that the Devil is behind the glass, controlled by a fence and a hot wire. This is his world, and he roams about...looking for whom he may devour.

Remember Col Cooper's comment? *If attacked in Condition White, the only thing that may save you is the inadequacy of your attacker. You will probably die unless your adversary is totally inept.* Our adversary is nowhere close to inept or inadequate! Be on your guard!

And he delights in hurting you, he'll jab you and make you bleed. He'll tell you lies and play with your mind and watch you squirm in anguish at the evil things he can work in your life...but that's not his goal.

His goal...is to devour you. To completely destroy you and hold you out of the Kingdom of God by pulling you away from Christ entirely. To trap you in his realm forever separated from God.

And all he has to do is to get you to sleep, unaware and oblivious to what he's doing in your field. Planting weeds. Don't do it...don't lie down...don't give up.

As our passage today reads...resist him! Ask God to give to you from His strength and His wisdom so that you can resist with power!

I'm going to read those verses once more, but I'm going to mix it up a little and hope that will help it to stick in our heads and hearts as we get ready to close.

⁸Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. ⁹Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world.

⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you.

¹⁰The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you after you have suffered a little while. ¹¹To him be dominion forever. Amen.

Let's pray.