**New Hope Global Sermon 3/28/22 What keeps you safe from the forces of evil in the world?**

**Introduction:**

“God forbid that I would sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you” (1 Sam. 12:25). These are the words of the prophet Samuel in the Old Testament. In Samuel’s day, the sin and evil in the world was blatant – both because of the Israelites’ disobedience to God and in terms of the enemies of Israel who were set of its destruction. Samuel was standing in the gap to ward off the attacks of these enemies. He fought against the power of aggressive evil and we need to too.

There are some important characteristics of Samuel as an intercessor that relate to us today. In the very beginning of his relationship with God, when God called his name, he answered, “Speak, for your servant is listening,” (1 Sam. 3:10). We also read from that same chapter, “The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up and he let none of his words fall to the ground,” (1 Sam. 3:19). Those traits of listening to God and internalizing God’s words in Scripture personally are essential for effective intercession for others. As a result, Samuel became a powerful intercessor. Later at Mizpah when the Israelites had returned to the Lord but the Philistines were attacking them, the Israelites were afraid. They said to Samuel:

”Do not stop crying out to the Lord our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines. Then Samuel took a sucking lamb and offered it up as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. He cried out to the Lord on Israel’s behalf and the Lord answered him. . .That day the Lord thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic they were routed before the Israelites” (1 Sam. 7:8, 9).

That’s the power of an intercessor who walks with God and stands in the gap for God’s people against their enemies.



In today’s world, the powers of evil are coming against Christians just as enemies came against Israel in earlier centuries. Jesus said that He had come to give life and to give it in abundance, but the evil one has “come to steal, kill, and destroy” Christians and every part of God’s kingdom agenda on earth (Jn. 10:10). The apostle Paul describes these evil forces in Ephesians 6 as, “rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms,” (v.12). He tells the Christians “to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. . . to put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (Eph.6:10-11). Intercession is one vital way we take that stand and can push back the enemy and prevail in God’s power.

God is still seeking Christians who will answer that call of intercession and push back the forces of evil in our day.

T**he Necessity of Effective Intercession for Christians Today**

In the Christian community, one of our joys is to pray for one another and ask for God’s intervention in people’s lives and the circumstances of our nations. But often those prayers seem more surface. The kind of intercessors God wants are those who pray resisting the forces of evil and deliberately pushing them back or casting them out in the strong name of Jesus our Lord. This kind of intercessor involves spiritual warfare and can often be a matter of life and death. The book I’m reviewing this week, *Prayer Shield* has many stories which make clear the spiritual warfare involved in protecting and equipping Christians for God’s ministry on earth. Author Peter Wagner says, “I do hope and pray that we will quickly learn how to use our spiritual weapons more effectively in putting a stop to the blatant and all-too-successful attacks of the devil. Intercessors provide a major weapon to help us win this battle,” (Peter Wagner, *Prayer Shield*, *How to Intercede for Pastors and Christian Leaders*, Chosen book (Baker) revised and updated 2014, p. 64). Wagner also describes his encounters with satanists around the world, who are praying to Satan to target the destruction of Christian people whom they name as they pray. As Jesus said, the enemy comes to “steal, kill and destroy.”

However, our western world, particularly, is dominated by the views of scientific materialism where any thoughts of the reality of the spirit world are dismissed or ridiculed. Christians, even since Jesus’ day have proved them wrong. Peter Wagner opens his book *Prayer Shield* with this personal testimony: “I have been a grateful recipient of God’s favor and His grace. To God be the glory!. . .I attribute my good fortune to the influence of intercessors, who open the gates of heaven so that God’s grace can continually flow into my life and my ministry. I am positive that I would not be where I am now without them. . .” (p. 8). I echo that. I also am personally very grateful for the team of people who pray for me. I can tell in my own spirit, in my own mental-wellbeing, in my own walk with God and my own body, when those prayers are going out for me and Keith. Those prayers have pushed back the forces of destruction, discouragement, discord, doubt, depression, distraction, disobedience and infirmity over the decades.

We need to actually believe Jesus’ words, beloved, that Satan exists and has spiritual forces of wickedness sent out to destroy God’s people. Being aware of the severe struggles many dear Christians we know around the world are facing gives proof to the power of evil forces pitted against them. What we need to realize is that Jesus has disarmed those forces, nailed them to the cross and risen triumphing over them, so the victory has been won (Col. 2:15). It is our job as Christian intercessors to claim that victory in the name of Jesus and the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11). The Bible says that is how Christians overcome Satan.

To make that point more powerfully, let me cite one of the many stories in Wagner’s book that demonstrates the role of powerful intercessors against the forces of evil in Wagner’s own experience:

On March 25th 1983, at 8:30 in the evening, I went out to our garage in Altadena California, to get some income tax papers. I had stored them up on a loft in the garage – 10 feet off the concrete floor. As I had been doing repeatedly for years, I climbed the step ladder to get onto the loft. My head was 12 feet above the floor when I began moving from the ladder to the loft. Then, in an instant, something pulled that ladder out from under me (I have chosen those words carefully!) and I took a freefall, landing on the back of my head, neck and upper back. During the second or so to complete the 12-foot drop, I was thinking to myself, *this is it!* But I was able to shout loudly enough so that Doris came running into the garage. My next door neighbor, Randy Becker, also heard the commotion and rushed over. He and Doris called 911 and prayed. The paramedics came and took me in an ambulance to the emergency room at St. Luke’s Hospital. They put me through all the required tests and x-rays, and a couple of hours later sent me home. Remarkably, they had found no structural damage or internal injuries. Yes, I was badly bruised, stiff and sore for several weeks, but I suffered no after-effects at all from what was the most serious accident of my life.

Meanwhile that evening, Kathy and her husband Mike had taken a group of young girls to a Ken Medema concert at a church… They had begun attending our 120 Fellowship Sunday school class (at Lake Avenue church). However we had not come to really know one another yet. When Kathy and her husband returned to their seats after an intermission, Kathy happened to notice that her watch said 8:30. They had begun to dim the house lights for effect when an incredibly powerful cloud of darkness seem to envelop Kathy. The presence of evil was so strong around her that she could actually smell it. In her spirit, she accurately identified it as a spirit of death and destruction. The Holy Spirit spoke to her saying, ‘it has come to destroy someone you have a relationship to, but not one of your children.’ She then felt a shield of protection between her and the force of evil, so she knew that she was personally safe. All this happened in an instant and without hesitation, Kathy began to pray under her breath for legions of angels. Then a severe pain came into her back and it felt as though her back was breaking. As she squirmed with pain, Mike whispered, ‘what’s wrong?’ All Kathy could say was, ‘my spirit is troubled and my back hurts.’ Mike laid on hands and prayed that her back would be healed. Kathy continued to pray in the Spirit for 20 minutes and then she sensed a total release. The battle was over; the evil cloud left; she relaxed, enjoyed the rest of the concert and went home to bed. Late that night, Kathy’s bedside telephone rang; it was our Sunday school class president alerting the Sunday school class prayer chain to pray for me because I had suffered a terrible accident. Kathy instantly knew in her spirit that this was what she had been praying for at the concert…Kathy called Doris and me the next morning …convinced [us] that Kathy’s faithfulness and prayer that night literally saved my physical life. Satan had sent an evil spirit… to kill me. For years after that, Doris and I took Kathy and Mike out to dinner, every March 25 to celebrate my deliverance from ‘THE FALL’ and express our gratitude to her for ministering to us (Wagner, pp. 126-127).

This is a true story, beloved, and highlights the reality of the power of evil that IS pitted against every Christian who walks with God. I know of evidence of this in my own ministry and the lives of countless Christians in earlier centuries who sought those with gifts of intercession to stand in the gap and protect them from the evils that Satan is bringing against God’s people.

The stakes are very high, but the praise and gratitude we can experience when we see the deliverances God brings through intercession are equally high. Sometimes we will see those visible evidences of a prayer shield that have protected us, but I expect, beloved, that this ministry of intercession is so constant that there are many times that powerful intercession has protected us from Satan’s “schemes” which we don’t realize. We will find all that out in heaven.

**The Challenge**

In the meantime, in application let me issue the challenge in the hymn: “Who is on the Lord’s Side?”

Who is on the Lord’s Side? Who will serve the King? Who will be his helpers, other lives to bring? Who will leave the world’s side? Who will face the foe? How is on the Lord’s side? Who for Him will go? By thy call of mercy, by thy grace divine, we are on the Lord’s side. Savior, we are thine.

Fierce may be the conflict, strong may be the foe, but the King’s own army none can overthrow. Round his standard ranging victory is secure; for his truth unchanging makes the triumph sure. Joyfully enlisting by thy grace divine. We are on the Lord’s side, Savior, we are thine.

(words: Frances Havergal, music: Luise Reichardt)

This hymn is often used as a call to cross-cultural overseas mission. But it is equally applicable to every aspect of God’s kingdom agenda in all the various ways Christians are called to “face the foe, claiming that victory is secure for his truth unchanging makes the triumph sure.” Here is a story of my experience of God’s victory from my book, *Salmon Swimmers*:

One Easter Sunday morning I awoke with an oppressive heaviness on my body that made it hard to even get out of bed. As the senior pastor of my church at the time, I was giving the Easter morning message. So I called out to my prayer partners and told them of the battle I was facing. I asked for their warfare prayers. They understood the need and agreed. As I went on to the church and into the worship service, that great weight of oppression was still pressing down on me. I was desperate for God to do what only He could do. When I arose to preach the message of Christ’s resurrection, I could barely stand, I had to hold on to the pulpit, but I felt the resurrection strength of God increasing with every sentence. I felt supported by the power of God and anointed by the Spirit to bring the words God had given me to share with the people. Even the congregation saw what was happening as my body and voice got stronger and stronger before their eyes.

Later that day I called my prayer partners to thank them for their intercession and tell them of God’s answer. One of my partners said: “Mary Lou, I was in my church at the time you were preaching, and God gave me a vision. I saw you standing holding onto your pulpit, and Jesus was standing right behind you, upholding you with his hands underneath your arms.” In situations like that, power in the preaching, and evidence of resurrection strength is what the Lord makes possible as we are plugged into Him 24/7 by the Spirit (Chapter 4, “Power Connectors”, Westbow Press, 2017).

Will you become God’s intercessor to protect the lives of a specific Christian in his/her ministry? Will you face the foe in the confidence of Christ’s victory and presence of the Holy Spirit in your life?

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