

Standing In The Gap

- *Ezekiel 22:30; I Peter 3:13-17*

➤ There's a story about a guy named John who had a serious memory problem. One day John ran into a friend he had not seen in a long time. He greeted him and said, "Bill, do you remember what a bad memory I had?" Bill answered, "Yes, I certainly do." "Well, it's not bad any more. I went to a seminar that taught us how to remember things. It was great, and now I have a wonderful memory."

Bill answered, "That's great! What was the name of the seminar?" "Well," John said, "wait a minute, my wife went with me. I'll ask her." He turned and saw his wife nearby.

Then he turned back to Bill and said, "What's the name of that flower with a long stem and thorns and a red bloom?" "Do you mean a rose?" Bill answered. "Yeah, thanks," John said. "Hey, Rose, what's the name of that seminar we attended?"

- Some people are forgetful. Our lives get busy and we forget things. This weekend, we have celebrated our nation's birth some 239 years ago & many have forgotten the value & the preciousness of the freedom that this great country once stood for.
- We have been busy with many festivities this weekend, but may we remember not only that we are an American, but that God has blessed this nation greatly over the years. But in many ways, our country has forgotten all about God & in recent years we have begun to see the downfall of this great nation.
- There have been many great heroes throughout our nation's birth who have stood for right & had a vision of a country that would not only be free, but one that would prosper & grow to be the greatest nation on this earth.
- All throughout this great land you will find memorials to our heroes, & I want to share one of them with you tonight.
 - World War II produced many heroes. One such man was Lieutenant Commander Butch O'Hare. He was a fighter pilot assigned to the aircraft carrier Lexington in the South Pacific. One day his entire squadron was sent on a mission. After he was airborne, he looked at his fuel gauge and realized that someone had forgotten to top off his fuel tank. He would not have enough fuel to complete his mission and get back to his ship. His flight leader told him to return to the carrier. Reluctantly, he dropped out of formation and headed back to the fleet. As he was returning to the mother ship he saw something that turned his blood cold. A squadron of Japanese aircraft were speeding their way toward the American fleet.
The American fighters and the fleet was defenseless. He couldn't reach his squadron and bring them back in time to save the fleet. Nor could he warn the fleet of the approaching danger. There was only one thing to do. He must somehow divert them from the fleet. Laying aside all thoughts of personal safety, he dove into the formation of Japanese planes. Wing-mounted 50 caliber's blazed as he charged in, attacking one surprised enemy plane and then another. Butch wove in and out of the now broken formation and fired at as many planes as possible until all his ammunition was finally spent. Undaunted, he continued the assault. He dove at the planes, trying to clip a wing or tail in hopes of damaging as many enemy planes as possible and rendering them unfit to fly. Finally, the exasperated Japanese squadron took off in another direction. Deeply relieved, Butch O'Hare and his tattered fighter limped back to the carrier. Upon arrival he reported in and related the event surrounding his return.
The film from the gun-camera mounted on his plane told the tale. It showed the extent

of Butch's daring attempt to protect his fleet. He had in fact destroyed five enemy aircraft.

This took place on February 20, 1942, and for that action Butch became the Navy's first Ace of W.W.II, and the first Naval Aviator to win the Congressional Medal of Honor. A year later Butch was killed in aerial combat at the age of 29. His home town would not allow the memory of this WW II hero to fade, and today, O'Hare Airport in Chicago is named in tribute to the courage of this great man.

- Butch O'Hare was one of the hundreds of thousands of men and women who have stood in the gap between freedom and tyranny and have given their life for our freedom.

➤ **Our scripture this evening is just one verse but it speaks volumes about standing firm for something.**

- We can certainly remember the stories of those men & women throughout the Bible like Joshua who have determined to not only stand themselves for the cause of God, but have encouraged & led others to do the same.
- But now the people of Israel are in a state of inconsistency. They have turned their backs on God again, chosen to go their own way & as they have seen before, God will not only this action to go unpunished.
- The prophet Ezekiel is writing to the people of Israel. He is warning them about what will happen if they don't turn back to God and continue to worship and obey him, and throughout this chapter he wrote of their impending destruction and exile.
- And in verse 30, here in Ezekiel 22, he writes that God is looking for someone who will stand up for what is right and be the hero that is needed.
- READ SCRIPTURE

➤ **The people of Israel had turned away from God. They had enjoyed freedom and peace as long as they were living and being the nation that God had intended them to be. And yet, God said that He could find "no one" to stand in the gap.**

➤ **Now, as a nation, we have been blessed. We have had so many through the history of our nation who have willingly stood in the gap for our freedom and for what is right.**

- In the Declaration of Independence, the framers wrote:
We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.
- The Jewish people had these same God given rights that are in our Declaration of independence.
 - God had given them their freedom from bondage in Egypt.
 - He had brought them safely through the desert into a land that was flowing with milk and honey as they had squandered the rights that God had given them and He was taking his hand of protection off of them.
 - All because no one would stand up for what was right and true and just. No one would stand in the gap.
- The Nation of Israel and Judah were both eventually defeated and sent into exile to other nations. All of this happened because there was no one to stand in the gap.
- While we honor our heroes for protecting our liberties, which include our religious freedoms, we are in need of people who will stand in the gap for our faith. For the Christian faith.
 - In many ways, you could argue that we are going down the same path to destruction that the Israelites walked.
 - We as a nation are losing our Christian heritage.

- If we do not have brave individuals who are willing to stand in the gap and fight for our faith, our future is bleak in this country.
 - This country was founded on principles of freedom of religion that were derived from the God of the Bible. We received our freedom through the tool of our military, but our freedom ultimately came from God, this is where our unalienable rights come from. Not the government.
 - Folks, we need some Heroes to stand in the gap for our faith. To model the Christian faith and be prepared to defend that faith.
 - It's not always easy to live the Christian life, I know that. But I need someone to show me how to live out my faith in the bad times as well as the good times.
 - My children, your children, your grand-children, they need to understand that living for God (especially in their time) will not always be easy. So it is our responsibility to prepare them today by living out our faith & setting before them an example of what a follower of God should be.
- **But with all that we are facing, how can we as men & women of God stand in the gap? How can we possibly make a difference in our world?**
- The apostle Peter tells us how to do this in I Peter 3:13-17:
1. **Be Courageous (v.14)**
 - In verse 14 he writes that we should not be afraid of threats from unbelievers. Be strong, be courageous.
 - Be faithful to God & serve Him boldly. Quit mixing in with the crowd. Make a statement with your life. Allow your testimony & your faith to be a light to others so that we might point many to the cross.
 - But then in verse 15, he gets to the heart of the matter.
 2. **Speak Life (v.15)**
 - Be ready to not only live out your faith ... but be ready to speak of your faith. Be ready to share with anyone this hope that you have. Tell them about God.
 - When Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives, each crisis becomes an opportunity for witness.
 - Charleston, SC
 - You see, I wonder how many times in our daily conversations does God even get brought up. Do we ever spend time sincerely speaking to others about the things of God & how He has changed your life?
 - Share Jesus with people so that when you are finished, they will know and understand who He is.
 - Then Peter gives us our method of sharing our faith.
 3. **Have A Good Conscience (v.16)**
 - Here Peter uses some interesting terminology as he looks at our conscience.
 - The conscience is that internal judge that witnesses to us, that enables us to "know with," either approving our actions or accusing.
 - How does a good conscience help a believer in times of trial and opposition?
 1. It fortifies him with courage because he knows he is right with God and men, so that he need not be afraid.
 2. A good conscience also gives us peace in our hearts; and when we have peace within, we can face battles without. The restlessness of an uneasy conscience divides the heart and drains the strength of a person, so that he is unable to function at his best. How can we boldly witness for Christ if conscience is witnessing against us?
 3. Share your faith in love.

- Share your faith lovingly. If there is one message that has been taught well to me here in my years at Inman, it has been to share God's message as you share the love of God. You do that through telling them about Jesus in a gentle and respectful way.
 - You know as you talk about loving people in Christ, you can't help but point out that in doing so, there may be a price for standing in the gap folks.
 - Some will not accept what you tell them.
 - Some may ridicule you and even try to hurt you in some way.
4. A good conscience removes from us the fear of what other people may know about us, say against us, or do to us.
- The life of Daniel.
 - When Christ is Lord and we fear only God, we need not fear the threats, opinions, or actions of our enemies. "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" ([Ps. 118:6](#))
 - It was in this matter that Peter failed when he feared the enemy and denied the Lord.

- "But Pastor, it is not always easy to live for God." True, sometimes we are forced to live "uncomfortably" as Andrea mentioned this morning. But look at how Peter ends this section of scripture in v.17.

➤ **Our military stands in the gap for our freedoms here in this country; but we must stand in the gap for our faith here in this country and around the world, not just for our own faith, but for those coming behind us.**

- Remember those who have sacrificed their lives for our freedom.
- Always remember the One who sacrificed His life for our salvation.
- We must be strong and remain faithful standing in the gap and defending what we know to be true.