

This past week I had the opportunity to hear a fighter pilot speak about his experience of being in the Pentagon on September 11 during the terrorist attack on the Pentagon. The fighter pilot said that he has had a lot of pretty scary moments in his life – landing jets at night on the deck of an aircraft carrier in high seas when the deck is pitching and rolling, being in combat, flying missions over Iraq at night with anti-aircraft fire.

But he said that he's never experienced anything like the moments after that jumbo jet slammed into the side of the Pentagon. His office, apparently, was near the impact site. He said it was really dark and smoky. He and some other men had to lift desks and office furniture off of people who were bleeding and traumatized. All these Defense Department employees just being thrown around their offices. The pilot said that in the smoke and darkness people were looking for leadership. Someone to help them get to safety.

And right now in our country, a lot of people are still looking for leadership, for direction, for someone to assist us to get through these dark times. We live at a profoundly insecure time in our nation's history. We as a country experienced the greatest single day's loss of life in any war ever fought on American soil by the September 11 terrorist attacks. The death toll was, as you know, far higher than Pearl Harbor and it was worse than any single day's loss in any Civil War battle. It was higher than Antietam. Higher than any day at Gettysburg.

Every day in this last month the newspaper headlines another anthrax scare infection. The FBI and the U.S. Customs Service claim that money used to fund Bin Laden's network is being funneled right from here in Central Ohio. The President and other administration officials keep warning us of other, perhaps even more deadly, terrorist attacks. They warn us that we need to keep our eyes open. That there is a possibility of chemical, biological and even, some are saying, nuclear attacks. This is an insecure time in terms of our physical safety, in terms of our future, in terms of our economic prospects.

And who is going to provide the leadership to help people to regain their bearings, to find their way out to safety, to assist kids in dealing with this crisis? People are looking for leadership. I have seen 3 things among people in the aftermath of this crisis that I think are general trends in our country. 1) uncertainty and fear about

It is a time when folks need to get a perspective, to fit what is happening, this craziness, into some sort of meaningful context that we can understand and deal with. We Christians can provide the leadership that this nation is looking for, if we understand and believe our Bibles. We can provide the leadership. I have seen three things among people in the aftermath of this crisis that I think are general trends in our country. First, uncertainty and fear about personal safety and the safety of families. The second trend is a pressure to put our principles in order. Thirdly, people have a desire for answers and in particular a desire for a deeper relationship with God.

We understand, we Christians, and we should understand that when we pick up our newspapers in the morning, or watch CNN, that we are involved in a bigger war than the one in Afghanistan. That the war is bigger than simply a war against domestic terrorism. The war is even bigger than a fight for our way of life, as some people are putting it now. Or a fight for democracy or a fight against the barbarians, as they attack civilization. We understand that we are involved in the war of all wars, the war of the ages.

So much of our nation is focused right now on the Afghan front line. And we are getting reports about the taking of the northern city of Mazar-E-Sharif. We, as a nation, have become expert in understanding the various groups that make up the Northern Alliance, the Tajiks, the Uzbeks, the Hazaras. We have learned about different strains of anthrax and how people can contract it.

But most people are completely ignorant about the great war that this current conflict is simply one expression of. Most people don't understand that what we are watching is simply a small manifestation of a much bigger conflict – and it is not a conflict between Muslims and Christians, or between the barbarians and civilization, or between dictatorships and democracies – it is a war that's been going on before people were created.

We read in the Bible that Lucifer, who was created as a beautiful angel, became enamored with his own beauty. Some believe that Lucifer was created to be the prime minister, the one who had delegated authority from God over a significant portion of God's creation. But we read that Lucifer (in Is. 14) became enamored with his own beauty, and he chose not to serve or worship God, but instead to focus upon himself. Lucifer declared his independence

from God. He wanted to be the center of the universe's worship and attention, to be like the Most High God.

And so Lucifer led a third of the angels into rebellion against God. He staged what we would call today an attempted coup d'état – an attempt to overthrow the King of the universe. Of course, he failed. The power of King Jesus was too great. Some of the rebel angels are being held in chains until the judgment day. Others have been given a limited amount of liberty to work in the universe, to set up a counterfeit kingdom of darkness.

But in the working out of Lucifer's, who became known as Satan, rebel plan, he led the first man and the first woman into rebellion and sin. And right now, the state of the mass of humanity is to live under an oppression that's worse than the oppression of the Taliban. The mass of humanity right now is living under the oppression of a counterfeit kingdom of darkness, a kingdom ruled by Satan. The mass of humanity is victimized and are victimizers. Rebels against the just government of God, fighting with each other.

And this recent conflict, this conflict with Bin Laden and the Taliban and these other terrorist networks is a manifestation of this great war started eons ago when Lucifer declared his independence from God. See, the war is so much bigger than Taliban.

When we say that we watch CNN footage and we shake our heads and think, "How in the world will we deal with so many committed people, crowds of people screaming in the streets in Pakistan, 'Death to America,' or burning American flags?" We hear young men declaring their intention to be suicide bombers. Young men saying if Bin Laden is martyred,

they will become the next Bin Laden. That there will be thousands of Bin Ladens manning the front lines. We in America shake our heads and say, “How do you deal with people like this – who are willing to commit suicide for their cause?”

We Christians need to provide leadership, a depth of understanding, context for what America is going through right now. We can help people order their priorities. We can help people find a deeper relationship with God. The real war, the conflict of the ages between the Kingdom of God and the counterfeit kingdom of darkness is not going to be won in a few days, weeks, or as the President said recently, this isn’t a Kodak moment. Military analysts are saying that the war in Afghanistan might not be won for several years. The war to disrupt these terrorist networks.

Friends, I’ll tell you that if you read your Bible, you will understand that the real war is going to be fought until the Lord returns. We won’t declare victory in the real war until every knee bows and every tongue in heaven and on earth and in hell confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord.

As we heard just a few minutes ago, we are going to have our annual missions conference next week with two fantastic speakers. But I want to today set the missions conference in the context of what we are experiencing right now at this moment in history. I’ve called today’s talk, “The Real War.” Let’s pray.

Romans 15:7-12 – *Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises*

made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples." And again, Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him." May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done – by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand." This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

You know, most people, even most Christians, live pretty small, uninspired lives. Ask the average person in America, "What's your goal for the day or the week, what are you trying to

do or accomplish?” If they have any thoughts about it at all, most people would say, “Well, I’m just trying to make a living.”

“I’m trying to survive.”

“I’m just trying to get through the day.”

“Today I have this huge project that I’m working on.”

“I’m trying to finish up this term paper.

“I’m trying to get this report done that my boss is asking me for.”

“I’m trying to make this sale.”

What is your goal regarding your children? “Well, I guess I just want my kids to be happy. Whatever they choose, I just want my kids to be happy.”

It seems like our eyes are always fixed to the ground and the very next step we need to take. It’s no wonder that God in the Bible repeatedly says to us to lift up our eyes, look to the heavens, think about something that’s bigger than the next sale, the next meal you are going to eat, the next load of laundry.

The one thing that governments do in any war is to try to persuade the public that this war is about a purpose that’s worth sacrificing for. If we are going to ask the public to send their sons or daughters into harm’s way, if we know that some men and women are going to be killed, if the war is going to cost a lot economically and we are all going to be asked to tighten our belts and to sacrifice, to be patient, maybe to wait for years until victory is achieved – then the war better be for a good and compelling purpose.

In WW II the purpose was to defeat fascism. In Korea, it was to stop the spread of communism. In Afghanistan, to destroy global terrorism. These are all high purposes. These are noble purposes. These are clear purposes.

When the purpose of the war gets fuzzy in the public's mind, as it did in Vietnam – we started off supposedly stopping the spread of communism and then it seemed like we were simply taking sides in a civil war. And then later, that we were just trying to save face as a nation and exit this quagmire with some dignity. When the purpose gets really fuzzy, people start protesting their involvement in the war. Why should we sacrifice for something we don't understand? Why should we send our sons and daughters or we ourselves go off to some war and possibly die for something less than great? Why be killed? Why have our children killed? Let's end this thing and get on with our lives.

Well, friends, the same principle is at work in the real war – the war between the Kingdom of God and the counterfeit kingdom of darkness. We Christians need to be persuaded that sacrifice in this war is worth it. Like every other war, this war's struggle, the real war, will result in comrades of ours dying. There are going to be casualties. It's going to cost a lot of money. People are going to be asked to sacrifice, to tighten our belts.

Why go to a missions conference and spend the time and money learning about the church's call to the entire world? Why go overseas to some dirty, uncomfortable, backwater place where the water is bad and the health care system is bad and where there are all kinds of weird diseases and bugs? Why go overseas, relocate as a missionary, where you or someone you love could get sick or die?

Why put your neck on the chopping block here at home by risking and sharing your Christian faith when you know that family member is hostile or that one of your elderly relatives just doesn't understand why you no longer go to the Catholic church or Lutheran Church, or to synagogue? Why put your head on the chopping block in a college classroom to suggest that there is someone in the class who actually still believes the Bible, just so people will think you're weird? Just so some colleague of yours at work will lose respect for you because you appear to be stupid or fanatical? Why pay the price of world missions or local evangelism? What's the high purpose that will motivate us to sacrifice?

The apostle Paul lays out the high purpose three times beginning in v. 5: *May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus.*

V. 7: *Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy.*

The reason why we are to work toward unity in our church and the reconciliation of our relationships is to bring glory to God, Paul says. The reason why we should accept one another, however different from you someone is – different racially, different backgrounds, different economically, different educationally – the reason why we are to accept one another is to bring praise to God, Paul says in v. 7.

The reason why Christ came, his whole mission on earth, his incarnation, his death and resurrection – it was all about bringing glory to God. This is the high purpose of all activity in our universe. This is the purpose of world missions. This is the purpose of evangelism. This is the purpose of doing church. This is the purpose of Sunday School. This is the purpose of parenting. This is the purpose of your marriage. This is the purpose of your life – to bring glory to God!

We are involved in missions and evangelism so that people who are currently oppressed and who are oppressors, who are victims and victimizers – living in the counterfeit kingdom of darkness, would recognize the worth, the beauty, the value that the Creator has and would praise him publicly.

See, let me just focus on missions for a moment. The high purpose of global missions, the highest purpose of sharing your faith, is not just to rescue lost people whose lives right now are headed straight to hell. It's a wonderful thing to rescue someone who is going to be in hell forever by sharing with that person your faith. It is a great thing to explain to someone how much God loves them and how God wants to love them out of their sin. It is a good thing to save a marriage that's on the rocks, heading for divorce court. We are more and more becoming a marriage saving church. It is a good thing to save a teenager from self-destruction by counseling a teen and being involved in teen ministry. It is a good thing to save an unborn baby from being aborted. It is a good thing to save a successful person, a person who is a mover or shaker – it is a good thing to save a successful person from lifelong emptiness.

But friend, the good things are not the ultimate things. Our mission in the world, whether we are talking about global missions or local evangelism, is not just about saving people from certain things – saving someone from hell or from addiction or from an eating disorder or from internet pornography, or from a pattern of destructive relationships. It is that, but it's more. Our mission - the ultimate reason why we Christians live and put our necks on the chopping blocks at work or at school, the reason we think about global missions and go ourselves - is to save people for something. Not just from hell, but for something bigger, for someone bigger – to save people for worship. So that people who were formerly in rebellion now live to give glory to God.

V. 9: So that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." Again, it says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples."

John Piper, in a wonderful book on global missions called "Let the Nations be Glad," started the book this way. He said, "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their knees before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever. Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions. It is the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples and the greatness of God."

Psalm 97 says, *The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice. Let the many coastlands be glad.*

Psalm 67 says, *Let the peoples praise thee, O God. Let all the peoples praise thee. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy.*

See, I think an enormous problem for Christians is that we get fuzzy about what our purpose is in this war, we start suffering what one writer called “Compassion Fatigue.” Pastors are regularly trying to motivate their flocks to do what God wants them to do. So pastors will talk about the need to love people, that we want to reach out to them with the gospel.

The truth is, and every pastor knows this in his or her heart, it is hard to care about people all the time. You hear a message that tells you that you should share your faith because people need God, because people are lost without God. Sometimes the speaker will pour on the guilt. Don’t you care that your neighbor is going to hell? Don’t you care about the person who sits next to you at school? Don’t you care about the millions of lost people in India or China or even your boss or your cousin or your colleague who will be lost forever?

You listen to the message and you want to care. It’s good to want to care. It’s good to pray that God would give you a heart of love for people. To pray to gain God’s heart. I pray that all the time: God, give me your heart for the church, for people in the world. God, give me your heart. Help me to feel what you feel. Give me your eyes. But very often, the truth is that my love for people is shallow. That I don’t really care enough to actually do anything. That all the guilt trips in the world only make our hearts harder.

Let's be honest. Many of us suffer from compassion fatigue. How do you have a heart big enough to care about the Afghans and Uzbeks, and the Somalis here in this country, and the unborn and our own families and friends? And especially, how do you have a heart big enough to care for someone who is unlovely? You know, the neighbor who plays his music too loud, or your obnoxious co-worker who talks too much? Or your stuck-up classmate who thinks that the world just revolves around them? Or the irritating person? How do you care enough for the unlovely person? Or the person 5000 miles away that you actually want to do something for them?

Paul is announcing the way out for us, friends. He says you need to get clear in your minds why you should go on a short-term mission trip and plan on doing that in the next couple of years. You ought to be clear about why you need to learn more about global missions at the conference. You ought to get clear in your mind why you should write a check for missions or pray about the advancement of the gospel around the world, especially at this time in Central Asia. You need to be clear about why you ought to share your faith regularly and regularly invite people to a church service.

It's not, Paul says, because you love people so much, but because you love Christ so much. See, ultimately it is not for people's good that we do missions. It is for God's glory. It is not simply to save people from hell, but to save someone for worship. To have one more person love and honor God the way God deserves to be loved and honored. You see, you can't put the second commandment to love you neighbor above the first commandment, to love God. We have to keep these things in the right order.

You say, “I have such a hard time loving this unlovely person enough to reach out to them.”

Paul says don’t share with people because you love them so much. Share with them because you love Jesus so much. They may be unlovely, but Jesus is lovely. They may have done nothing for you, but Jesus gave his life for you. They may be unkind, but Jesus is kind. They may have only done you harm, but Jesus has only done you good and you want the other people to honor him.

Do the right thing. Reconcile your relationships in the church. Share your faith. Invite someone to church. Give. Tithe. Pray for people around the world. Not because you are overflowing with zeal for someone’s salvation, but because you love Jesus and you want him to get glory, to be honored, to be praised by one more person.

You say, “I don’t love her. I don’t love that woman. In fact, I don’t even like her.”

OK...but do you love Christ? You say, “Well, I don’t know if I even love him.” The starting point of all missions is worship. Or as Piper put it, the fuel for all missions is worship. That’s why we take 30 minutes each week to just worship God. Don’t waste that time. Worship him. Look at him. Read psalms to Jesus. And the more you praise God, the more you worship God, the more you are going to desire that other people join you in worship.

Friends, there is something so much bigger than just wanting to be happy and safe and wanting your children to be happy and safe. That's OK, but how about a goal that says I want my children to grow up to glorify God, to live for the honor of Jesus in all that they do. That their marriages would honor Jesus. That at their jobs they would honor Jesus. That in their life choices they would honor Jesus.

Now, how are we going to fight this war? The grand purpose is to see people converted so that from a place of rebelling against God and living without God, a person desires to live for God, to honor God, to worship God. How will that take place?

I want you to see that the New Testament doesn't teach that the mission of causing a rebellious world to worship Christ and value Christ above everything, to glorify Christ, is going to happen by human ingenuity or by human strategizing or a month of planning meetings. It is one thing, friends, to defeat an enemy militarily. That's a tough job. But we have military planners and diplomats who know how to build alliances, who can by our military superiority control the skies. They know how to work on the ground. They know how to work through surrogates on the ground. They know how to bomb for months.

But to convert people's hearts – the real war – to cause a self-centered, angry, bitter, victimizing and victimized person – a person who is just wrapped up and tied up in their careers and under a mountain of debt, a person who is afraid and just wants to be safe, a person who is living with sexual addictions, with all their little hobbies and purchases and false allegiances, and their golf games and consuming passion to purchase more Hummels for their houses, and putting more chatkes up – do you know what a chatkes is? Just go into

Danny Meyer's office and you will see chatkes – little things all over. Usually grandmothers have these little keepsakes all over the place. To take people's whose lives are loaded down and to convert them so that they choose to worship Jesus and to live for Jesus and to value Jesus above everything else – how do you win a war for people's hearts? For the deepest aims of their lives?

The only way people will be changed – people like your parents, people like your kids, folks like your spouse or your friend at work or the person who sits next to you in class, or your physician or your beautician or Protestants or Catholics or Vineyard people or Jews or Muslims – the only way we are going to get converted so that we want to live for the glory of Christ is by the power of Jesus Christ.

Every single one of the Great Commission passages – Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:45-49; John 20:21-22; Acts 1:8 – every one of the five Great Commission passages in the New Testament tells us about our need for the power of God, if we are going to accomplish a mission of converting people at the heart level so that they want to live for God's glory.

Charles Spurgeon, a great English preacher from the 19th Century, once commented on one of the Great Commission texts – the text from Matthew 28 where Jesus says, *All power is given to me in heaven and on earth* and then he concludes with *go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations*. He concludes by saying *I am with you always*. Spurgeon commented on the Great Commission and said, "You have a power mentioned here that is absolutely infinite. What does it matter what powers there are in opposition? People say, 'I will do what I can.' Any

fool can do that. The person who believes in Christ does what he cannot do. He attempts the impossible and he accomplishes it.”

See, Jesus is not sending you out as a Christian into the world to do what you can do in someone else’s life. He’s asking you to do what you cannot do to accomplish what is impossible – the conversion of someone’s heart. Don’t try to do, friend, what you can do. The Christian life becomes thrilling, exciting, when you as a Christian attempt to do what you cannot do apart from the power of God.

Paul tells us how we accomplish the impossible in v. 18. He says, *I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God.* Not what I can do and what I can accomplish. I’m going to tell you about what Christ has done; what Christ has accomplished.

Friend, how often do you think about your own inadequacies? Well, I just don’t know very much. I don’t speak very well. I am really afraid. I am kind of messed up here or there. You focus on your own inadequacies. You look at yourself and your own resources, your own abilities. How often do you do that? If you struggle with confidence, if you are a person who is somewhat timid, I’ll bet one of the issues is that you are regularly looking at what you can do – your talents, your knowledge, your arguments.

But what about what Christ could do through you? What about the fact that Christ is at work in you? How big will you dare to dream, to pray? How much will you ask Christ for? Will you ask him for the conversion of your entire family? Will you keep praying for that

until it's done? Will you ask Christ for the conversion of your kids, your parents, your mate, your ex-spouse so that all of these folks can live for God's glory?

How about the conversion of the people on your block? The folks in your office? Will you ask him for that? How about the conversion of this city – that the whole city would glorify Jesus? How about the conversion of the nation or the Muslim world? How does the power of Christ work through you? How is the power of Christ actualized, brought to bear, brought to earth?

Paul gives us the answer in vv. 18-19: *By what I have said and by what I have done – by the power of signs and miracles through the power of the Spirit.* The power of Christ is actualized by what we say and what we do – through proclamation and through demonstration. Through the preaching of the gospel and through signs and wonders. See, we are involved in a war. Jesus describes every conversion as plundering the strong man's house. Every time you meet someone who is not yet a Christian, they are living under the domination of a counterfeit kingdom of darkness. They are being kept secure and safe by the power of the enemy. How do you deal with the power of the enemy?

Martin Luther put it really well in “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” He said, “One little word can fell him.” There's power in the Word of God. There's power in the preaching of the gospel. Yes, the God of this world has blinded people's eyes, but when God speaks and says, “Let light shine out of darkness,” people are awakened to the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Do you understand the power of the gospel that you share? Yes, you are inadequate. I am inadequate. I can't change someone's life or heart by own resources. But when you share the simple message with someone that Christ has died for their sins to be their Savior and that he has risen from the dead to be their Lord, that as Lord and Savior, Christ now offers the gift of forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit to everyone who repents and believes. When you explain the simple message, "Friend, you can be forgiven. You can be given abundant life" there's power in that.

The power for missions is also shown as Paul says, *Not only by what I've said, but by what I've done. By the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit.* So many Christians confine God's power to speech, to our persuasion, to our reasoning and our proclamation. But the other leg of power is "what I have done." By the power of signs and wonders, not just persuasion evangelism, but power evangelism.

And, friends, you know that the power of signs and wonders to open a door for the gospel is not just confined to the age of the apostles as some churches teach. This is part of our inheritance. We need a full range of weapons to fight the real war, just as the American military needs a full range of weapons – not only ground forces, but air forces. We need a full range of weapons, if we are going to be involved in this monumentally difficult task of converting people into worship.

Let me tell you a few stories. It has been widely reported that the most significant factor in the growth of the church in China during the years following the communist takeover in 1949 was the supernatural dimension – the power of signs and wonders. There is a man

named David Wang, who is the general director of Asian outreach. He worked in China for many years and was a native of Shanghai. He told this story about meeting a physician, who asked him to come to his house for a private discussion.

So he went to this physician's house and the physician said, "You know, I've been an atheist and a communist and I believe the party line. I've never been to a church. I've never talked to a Christian. I've never even seen a Bible until tonight, much less read one. But I believe now in Jesus with all my heart."

And he went on to describe this encounter that he had. He said, "A few months ago, a peasant woman arrived in my emergency room. While she was working at her commune, a huge rock was dislodged and it fell on her chest and crushed her. The barefoot doctors in her village couldn't do anything, so they sent her to the city. When I saw her I realized there was nothing that we were going to be able to do for her. Every bone on the left side of her chest was shattered. The broken ribs had punctured her lungs, just ripping them apart. I put the woman in a bed to die and I heard her gasping, "Jesus, save me. Jesus, save me." It didn't mean anything to me, so I went home.

"The next morning I got to the hospital and walked into this woman's ward. I couldn't believe my eyes. Instead of an empty bed where they had taken this woman's dead body out overnight, this peasant woman was sitting up gulping rice soup. I screamed at her, 'What are you doing?' And this poor woman was so frightened, she put the soup down and said, 'Oh, Doctor, I'm sorry. The nurse asked me if I was hungry and I said yes.'

“I thought there might be a mistake, so I checked her name and her work unit number. It was the same woman. I rushed her back to x-ray and I discovered that every single bone in her chest was completely healed. Her lung capacity was completely restored.

“I don’t know very much about him, but I totally now believe in that woman’s Jesus because I have seen his power and I will read the Bible.”

David Wang reported that the woman went back to her village and showed the x-rays of her broken ribs and her punctured lungs and the x-rays of her completely healed ribs by the power of Jesus. Eighty of the 120 families in the village were converted through this woman’s testimony.

Do you know the power of signs and wonders was so powerful and widespread that the communist government tried to take some steps to curtail the spread of miracles? They published a list of ten “Don’ts” for government-approved churches in China. The list contained items like:

1. Don’t criticize the Party and its policies in the name of preaching.
2. Don’t pretend to be a pastor or elder or conduct baptisms or otherwise increase the number of believers.
3. Don’t pray every day. Pray only on Sundays.

And then the last item was: “Don’t pray for the sick or cast out demons.” See, the communists know how people get changed. Don’t pray. Pray just once a week. And don’t pray for the sick or cast out demons. The power of signs and wonders.

A church leader in Ethiopia was arrested during the communist takeover of Ethiopia. He was interrogated and tortured. One of the interrogators demanded that he curse the enemies of the Revolution. The Christian said that he couldn’t curse anyone – Jesus told us to bless our enemies. The communist interrogator said, “Then, you need to grasp this high voltage wire.” There was a bare electrical wire held in front of him. The Christian leader grasped the wire and he screamed, “In the name of Jesus.” The whole town immediately blacked out. The man was totally unhurt. He raised both fists in the air and screamed, “Praise the Lord.” Many people were converted when they heard the testimony of this miracle.

John G. Lake was an early Pentecostal back in the 20th century. He went to South Africa and began preaching the gospel. Nobody attended any of his meetings. He decided to fast and pray and seek God for the harvest. On the 21st day of his fast, he was walking down one of the main streets of Johannesburg when a horse pulling a carriage stumbled and broke its legs. The horse was lying in the street, thrashing about. A policeman came over and talked with the owner of the horse. They decided that the horse should be shot and put out of its misery. Just as the policeman aimed his gun at the horse, John G. Lake felt inspired by God. He walked up to the policeman and said, “Don’t shoot the horse. God has told me that he wants to heal that horse.”

Everyone standing around was aghast. Lake stretched out his hand and began to pray for the horse's broken leg. The horse calmed down and then got up to his feet. The horse's leg was completely healed and he pulled the carriage down the rest of the street. People went to John Lake's meeting that night. They kept coming. Over the next five years, John G. Lake averaged one church plant every three days. The power of signs and wonders.

Let me ask you something. Do you ask God to work powerfully through your life, to empower your words as you speak them to someone else? Do you ask God for opportunities to pray for a sick person? Do you approach anyone at work or at school and say, "Can I pray for you?"

Don't just try to accomplish what you can do. Try to accomplish what you can't do apart from the intervention of God.

Last thing, how do we know when victory will be achieved? You know, along with clarity regarding our purpose, and the use of our weapons, when can we say that the war is over and we are ready to go home?

Again, to use the war analogy, in WW II the government was clear that there was no victory until Germany and Japan unconditionally surrendered. In the Gulf War, many people feel that we declared victory too early, that we shouldn't have ended the war until the government of Saddam Hussein was toppled. In the current crisis, the same question is being asked: how do we know when we have won and when the war is over?

Paul tells us when in his mind victory will be achieved. See, his ministry up until this point was confined to the Eastern Mediterranean, from Jerusalem to the former Yugoslavia. He had incredible success. He planted dozens of churches, but he doesn't declare victory. He doesn't say, "Well, now that I've planted 100 churches, it's time for me to just go home." Sometimes we declare victory too early, like perhaps we did during the Gulf War. "Well, we've won enough; it's time to go home." It's easy in a church like ours to declare victory too early. "Well, the church is big enough. We're doing fine. We've got lots and lots of people. We've got a great teen ministry. We've got a great marriage ministry. We've got a new building."

Paul said his ambition was to preach the gospel where Christ was not known. Literally, where Christ was not yet named, where Christ was not yet honored. There's no victory until Christ is named and honored among every people group on the planet. Wherever Christ is not yet named, wherever there's a group of people that doesn't yet honor Christ, the mission is not over and the real war continues.

I began with a story of a fighter pilot who was in the Pentagon on the day that some terrorists decided to crash a jumbo jet into the side of the Pentagon. He said that evening after helping people out of the building, his family gathered around. They hugged each other and kissed each other. They were so grateful he was alive. They talked. Later that night, his son, who is a really committed Christian, came outside where the pilot was sitting on the front porch, and sat down next to him. He said, "Dad, God kept you alive for a purpose.

There's a reason you are alive today. I just have one question for you, what are you going to do with the rest of your life?"

- I. The Purpose of Our Mission (Romans 15:5-13)
 - A. Saving From and Saving For
 - B. The Second Commandment and the First

- II. The Power of Our Mission (Romans 15:17-19)
 - A. What I Have Said
 - B. What I Have Done

- III. The End of Our Mission (Romans 15:20-22)