

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

MAN THE BARRICADES



“Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!” David Glasgow Farragut, who entered military service at age nine as a midshipman and served in the Navy for 51 years, uttered these famous words on August 5, 1864 at the Civil War Battle of Mobile Bay. Invading the Confederate bay with his Union fleet, one of Farragut’s lead ships hit a Confederate torpedo (what we today would call a sea mine) and immediately sank. The line of Union ships froze in the water, afraid to proceed and created a bottleneck. Heavy cannon fire from nearby Fort Morgan threatened to sink Farragut’s fleet. Rather than floating in the bay like sitting ducks, Farragut commanded his ship full speed ahead into the torpedoes. Reportedly his words to the other ships in his fleet were, “Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!” His ship led the way through the mines into Mobile Bay and soon defeated the Confederate naval fleet. No further Union ships were lost.

Have I mentioned we’re at war? As early as c. 260 A.D., Bishop Cyprian of Carthage analogizes Christians living through the Roman Empire’s Cyprian Plague to soldiers “entering service” who “will fight without fear of death when the battle comes.”

Another parallel between war and pandemic is fog and confusion.

- Is the church essential or nonessential?
- Who tells the church if we’re essential-Jesus or the government?
- Should churches sue the government or obey the government?
- Do we best love our neighbor by meeting in person, virtually or not at all?
- Which is more important safety or sacrifice?
- Is wearing a mask wise or a fear-based lack of faith?
- Where should we meet and with what restrictions?
- Should we wait for things to “return to normal” or is waiting for normal an illusion of false hope?
- Is God active or inactive in our current pandemic? If active, then how?
- If the current situation continued another year or worsened, how many Christians, let alone non-Christians who lack the hope of the gospel, would make it through?

This is a small sample of the paralyzing fog we face today.

The Barna Group, a reputable U.S. polling firm that surveys contemporary trends within the church, recently reported that one third of active U.S. Christian worshippers before the pandemic say they have ceased any involvement in worship, including online, indoors or outdoors, since the pandemic began. Thank goodness the U.S. Church is not facing actual persecution like the Christian churches of China, Iran or North Sudan. And what will happen to that one third number, if our current pandemic continues another year? Will it become one half? In John 10:10, Jesus said he came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. Is Jesus’ church in the United States today what abundant life looks like?

In the face of “the fog of pandemic,” we need a new rallying cry, similar to the famous words of David Glasgow Farragut, “Damn the torpedoes!” How about, “Man the damn barricades”? Let’s recognize we’re in a spiritual battle. Pick up a spiritual weapon. And learn how to fight, both defensively and offensively, in this new context. However, unlike the Battle of Mobile Bay, our war is a war of attrition that will last for many months, if not years. Therefore we will need to “man the damn barricades” repeatedly as a church, not just “damn the torpedoes” in one quick act of daring.

To use another war image from the Old Testament, Nehemiah called the returned exiles of Jerusalem to pick up a trowel and sword. With the trowel, they rebuilt the destroyed walls of Jerusalem. With the sword, they defended against enemy attacks, until the wall was complete. What are our trowel and sword today? How are we called to engage the spiritual, emotional, psychological and public health battles that currently surround us? I suggest three fronts of this war need urgent attention.

First, we need to focus on our spiritual foundation. If you have not yet felt the storm “beat against [your] house,” (Matthew 7:25) you surely will. According to Jesus in the three synoptic gospels, the only difference between the house that collapsed in the storm and the house that stood was their foundation. The house built on Jesus Christ and faithfulness to God’s word withstood the storm. All houses built on other foundations eventually collapse before the storm’s overpowering ferocity. All indications are that our current pandemic is going to intensify, not decrease, especially as the fall and winter draw nearer. If your spiritual foundation needs strengthening, now is the time. Talk to your pastor. Find a Christian spiritual mentor who can help you build a rock-solid foundation. If you can’t find either, contact Resurrection Church. (See church contact below). We are happy to help.

Second, we need a fervent torrent of prayer. In 1 Samuel the renewal of Israel began with a barren, sorrowful woman named Hannah, who was mocked for her barrenness by her own family. For years she poured out her heart in a flood of prayer to the Lord. 1 Samuel 1 says Hannah was “deeply distressed...wept bitterly...troubled in spirit...pouring out her soul...speaking out of great anxiety and vexation...[and asking God to] look on her affliction.” Eventually God gave Hannah a son, Samuel, who later identified and anointed King David, who united and renewed Israel.

We as a country are certainly “vexed and anxious,” but have we matured to the point of Hannah who poured out her soul in a torrent of prayer to God Almighty? Jesus says in Matthew 5, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” If we will humble ourselves, recognize our poverty of spirit, turn away from empty things and seek the Lord in fervent prayer as Hannah did, I believe we can and will see renewal as a nation.

Third, as a growing number of Christians depart the life of the church during a pandemic, the church needs to go on the offensive proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ in a world increasingly overcome by hopelessness, darkness, selfishness and anger. We can do this through planting new churches, sharing testimonies of Jesus’ goodness and pushing back against hopelessness, selfishness, rage and fear. Peter tells us to be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us. Are you ready?

My hope for the church today is that we will not decline, but go on the offensive, that we will “man the damn barricades.” I invite you to join this rallying cry by strengthening your own foundation, growing in fervent prayer like Hannah, being ready to share your testimony or assisting in planting new churches. May the Lord bless and keep his church. Amen.



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*Note: Pastor Lovejoy recently wrote a pastoral letter to his congregation about the similarities between war and pandemic. This page contains excerpts from that pastoral letter.

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