

Sentry Duty

After the events of September 11th, I wondered, “What next?” Experts surmised that there were several ways that terrorists could sow destruction upon our country such as anthrax, contamination of the water supplies and the sabotage of nuclear facilities. On the news there were discussions on how the police and military would guard key facilities and keep their eyes open to suspicious activities. With a country that is so open, I wondered how effective guards would be in stopping terrorist activities. Growing up I was an avid James Bond fan. He always had a way to get behind enemy lines and destroy this or that evil plot. If Bond could do that, then what about terrorists? How much of a deterrent would sentries be at guarding key installations around the country?

I asked a military friend about this and he gave me some insight. He had responsibilities as a sentry at different times and told me there was a protocol that made it extremely difficult for the enemy to sneak by a sentry. This is how it works...

When a sentry spots someone approaching a restricted area, he says, “Halt, who goes there?” and waits for the intruder to give his/her name. He then says, “Advance to be recognized.” The intruder then must come forward to meet the sentry face to face. The sentry then gives a clue word, such as “coffee” and the intruder must respond with the proper password, such as “sugar.” If the correct password is given, the intruder is allowed to go into the restricted area. If not, then he/she is denied entry. It doesn’t matter if the intruder is (or looks like) the commanding officer, the girlfriend of the captain or Colin Powell. If the correct password isn’t given, he/she is denied access to the restricted area. Rank or strength or appearance doesn’t matter: if the correct password isn’t given, access is denied. This is comforting to know, for James Bond always seemed to have a way of getting by the guards, didn’t he?

There will come a judgment day when Jesus will say to each of us, “Advance to be recognized,” and He will fully recognize us. Scripture tells us, “He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts.” (*1 Corinthians 4:5*) Every thought, motive and deed throughout our entire lives will be exposed on that day. There will be no deceit and trickery that we can pass by the Judge on that day- Jesus will fully recognize us.

Some people think that they can find a way to get into the kingdom of heaven without the proper password. We may think that our good deeds, our attendance and participation in church and religious rituals will be the password to heaven, or the fact that we knew a spiritual leader or were born into a spiritual family, but Jesus made sure we understood that none of these were the password. Only He was the password, “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate, whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never

perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one...I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this? ...I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (*John 10:7-11, 27-30, 11:25-26, 14:6*)

Jesus is the password. Just as in war, it is not enough to know about the password, you must know the password. Do you know Jesus? Do you believe in Jesus? Do you trust in, cling to, rely upon and adhere to Jesus as the password for your salvation? Is He in you and are you in Him? Faith is not simply an intellectual exercise of acknowledging that you believe in Jesus. The Apostle James writes, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that- and shudder." (*James 2:19*)

Jesus painted a beautiful picture of the relationship that He has with His true believers, that of a vine and its branches who receive all nourishment from the Vine. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful...Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me." (*John 15:1-2,4*) Are you in the Vine? Is Christ in you? Have you received Him into your heart? "To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." (*John 1:12-13*) If He is in you, then you will bear fruit- the abundance of Jesus in your life will be apparent for all to see. Your life will stick out like a sore thumb. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (*2 Corinthians 5:17*) If He is not in you, there can be no faking it- the transformation will be evident for those who are in Christ- there will be a new birth and there will be fruit. "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again...for God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (*John 3:3,16*)

So how do we become one with the Vine? How does Christ come into us and we come into Him?

The Bible says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (*Romans 3:23*) and "The wages of sin is death." (*Romans 6:23a*) We are born in sin and it separates us from the Vine. We must come to a point of brokenness and repentance before God, acknowledging that we are sinners and pleading for His deliverance. This is when Jesus Christ can come into us through our faith, "But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (*Romans 6:23b*) How do we inherit eternal life? "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (*Romans 10:9*) When we confess that we are sinners and accept Christ's payment on the cross for our sins, we are saved and become one with the Vine. The Holy Spirit enters our hearts and we are forgiven of all our sin. In God's eyes, we have been cleansed and justified by the blood of Jesus Christ, "Since we have been

justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (*Romans 5:1*) We now have the power of God in our lives to feed off the Vine and live a new life devoted to Him.