

# CIRCLE YOUR WAGONS

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## Introduction: Scripture Reading (I Peter 4:7-10)

- A. **Illustration:** Picture a caravan of rickety covered wagons heading down a grassy prairie of the Midwest. Suddenly they come under a heavy attack from Indians so the wagons come together in a tight circle. This circle provides protections for the women and children and gives the brave pioneers a fighting chance to hold off or defeat the enemy.
- B. **There is a spiritual parallel to this that Peter wants all of us to understand (I Peter 4:7-10)**
1. Peter is calling all Christians to come together as one to stand against the devil and difficult times that could pull apart a church or cause one to be overcome by trials
  2. There's four important ways he says we can "circle our wagons" – Be sober and watchful in our prayers and share a fervent love, hospitality, and a spirit of service
- C. **Notice why Peter says we should circle our wagons:**
1. He says, "The end of all things is at hand" (**vs. 7**) – What is Peter referring to?
    - a. I don't believe he is talking about the final coming of Jesus – Peter could look at what was going on & know the end was near... Not true of the final coming!
    - b. This was concerning a judgment that was to begin at the house of God – (**vs. 17**)
    - c. A similar instruction is given to the Hebrews concerning "the Day" (**Heb 10:24-25**)
    - d. This very clearly fits Jesus' warnings in Matthew 24 concerning the destruction of Jerusalem... When they saw certain signs they could know that end was near!
  2. When this occurred, it would've been a time of suffering, trials, & persecutions for the Christians – If not pulling together, Satan would win, pulling them away from Christ!
  3. While we're not facing the trials of the destruction of Jerusalem, these lessons apply!
    - a. It may be that some of us are going through extreme health problems and we feel like there is no end to pain, suffering, and inconvenience – We need this help!
    - b. Maybe you are facing financial worries or fears of the unknown in the future
    - c. There are problems we face from time to time as a church – This could be attacks from without or problems from within – We need to rally around each other!
    - d. It could be the daily struggle to live righteously in an unrighteous world – It's something none of us can do alone, we need the help of the circle!

## I. BE SOBER AND WATCHFUL IN YOUR PRAYERS

### **A. Consider the source that these instructions are coming from – Peter!**

1. Remember what transpired as Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane (**Mt 26:36-40**)
  - a. Here Jesus was gearing up to face the most difficult time He had ever faced in His betrayal, trials, denials, & crucifixion – He was being overcome by sorrow!
  - b. His agony was so intense He was sweating a water and blood mixture!
  - c. Notice His one request of His closest disciples – WATCH AND PRAY WITH ME!
  - d. When Jesus needed them to "circle their wagons" they slept! (**vs. 41-45**)
2. This was also the same Peter who stood and denied knowing Jesus!
  - a. He had walked with Jesus, talked with Jesus, ate with Jesus, and learned from Jesus for about three years... Now he's claiming he doesn't even know Him!
  - b. Jesus had even told Peter that he would deny Him – Peter did not think it could ever happen and basically said, "I will not do that!" – Wasn't watching for it!
  - c. When the pressure arose Peter did the very thing he swore he would never do... If he was sober & watchful in his prayers, the outcome could've been different!
3. So when Peter writes these words, he is writing from the experience of one who knows what happens when you don't watch and pray! (**I Peter 4:7**)

### **B. As we consider facing difficult times, we must be sober and watchful!**

1. Let's get a good understanding of what these words mean: (**Mark 5:15**)
  - a. **Sober (Serious):** "To be of a sound mind, in one's right mind, exercise self-control, and to not be ruled by one's passions"

- b. **Watchful:** To abstain from wine, be sober, watch, be circumspect; however, this is more than not being drunk with wine or alcohol, but a constant state of mind
- c. This is the same phrase that is used to describe the man who was possessed by the legion of demons after Jesus healed him... "Clothed and in his right mind"
- 2. As we consider the dangers that surround us, let us walk carefully! (**1 Pet 1:13; 5:7-8**)
  - a. This means we don't allow the heat of the moment or our passions to rule our decisions – We carefully consider the path we are walking and its destination!
  - b. Be alert to things hindering us as we run the Christian race and remove them
  - c. Peter understood well why staying alert to Satan's tactics was so very important and he knows the tendency we have to minimize the dangers in our mind!
  - d. This is so contrary to today's society who would tell us – "Eat drink and be merry... for tomorrow we die!" or maybe "Life is short... so play hard!"
- 3. As we move from considering our personal lives to thinking about circling our wagons, we need to have this same mindset in considering one another! (**Js 5:19-20; Acts 20:30-31**)
  - a. **Illustration:** One wagon driver hollering to the one in front of him – "INDIAN!"
  - b. If you see your brother or sister walking down a path that will lead them away from the Lord, circling the wagons means to do everything you can to stop them!
  - c. So what if my brother or sister comes to me warning me about the path I am walking... How do we respond? Remember, they are watching for our souls!

### C. A person who is sober and watchful will certainly be a person of prayer!

- 1. Peter probably was remembering the words of Jesus in this matter (**Luke 21:34-36**)
- 2. The book of Acts is full of examples where the Christians practiced this (**Acts 12:5, 12**)
  - a. Picture this for a moment – There's probably crying, hugging, holy kissing, hand holding, and a WHOLE HEAP OF PRAYER... Nothing but prayer probably!
  - b. Why did God reveal this account like this? It shows the importance and power of prayer! They were praying for Peter the very moment God released him!
  - c. What if we did this today? Some would say, "They've gone charismatic!" - If being charismatic means knowing prayer's power... I wanna be charismatic!"
- 3. Paul often shows the need to pray for one another – An example: (**Col 1:9-12**)
  - a. We normally pray for one another when we are sick, traveling, or confessing sin... These are good, but as Paul shows, we need to pray for so much more!
  - b. Look around you this morning... When is the last time you prayed SPECIFICALLY for the person sitting beside, in front of, across, or behind you?
  - c. **Illustration:** Song – "I Need The Prayers Of Those Who Love Me" – This song should be our motto! None of us can make it without one another's prayers!
- 4. Prayer is the NATURAL result of one who is living soberly! (**Phil 4:6; Eph 6:11, 17-18**)
  - a. Prayer not only is both our greatest defense and greatest weapon as Satan tries to attack us, drag us down, & keep God's work in this area from progressing!
  - b. Some act like this, "When all else fails... pray about it!" or as I have heard some say, "Well... I guess all we can do about the situation is pray about it!"
  - c. Remember that when you pray you are no longer taking the problem on yourself and entreating the assistance of the creator & sustainer of the universe!

## II. HAVE FERVENT LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

### A. Our love ought to be a distinguishing factor of true discipleship!

- 1. We also circle our wagons by loving one another (**vs. 8**)
  - a. Notice the level of this love – FERVENT! Literally – "Intense... without ceasing"
  - b. This takes two things: (1) Being involved in the lives of my brothers and sisters in Christ (2) My allowing them to enter and be involved in my life as well
- 2. Our love ought to be an outgrowth of realizing God's love for us! (**1 John 4:7-11**)
- 3. When we see one another going through trying times physically (**1 John 3:17-18**)
  - a. Real love reaches out and gives assistance, not just words, to those who are suffering! Words can be cheap & mistaken... actions speak the truth clearly!
  - b. Whenever family is in need what do you do? You go to their assistance as quickly

- as you can and you don't grumble about it! Why? THEY'RE FAMILY!
- c. Think about Job – One of the ways Satan tries to destroy us spiritually, whether individually or collectively, is through attacking our physical needs! Now, what happens if when we suffer like that we rally behind one another in help?
- 4. We have enough to worry about with Satan trying his best to rip us apart from without, we simply cannot afford to be tearing each other apart from within! **(Eph 2:12-15)**
  - a. Jesus the very thought of cannibalism turns our stomachs, as it should! But the reality is that some brethren bite and devour one another spiritually!
  - b. If the Lord's army is the only army that shoots its own wounded then put the weapons down! Let's not be part of a problem but part of the solution!
  - c. The body of Christ, the family of God, must be the place where we find the greatest encouragement and support... Not the greatest opposition and criticism!
- 5. Evangelistic: The more we perfect this, the more souls will want to be a part of this family!

#### **B. We must have this love for one another, because it covers a multitude of sins!**

- 1. Once again, Peter was the perfect person to write on this, because he had personally experienced the restoring power of love! **(Mark 16:6-7; John 21:15-17)**
  - a. God specifically, through an angel, tells them to tell PETER that Jesus had risen from the dead! Even after Peter denied Christ, God still showed love for him!
  - b. Jesus then seeks Peter out to reaffirm His love for Peter and Peter's love for Him
  - c. Peter's denial of Jesus could have devastated him... shipwrecking his faith! His end could've been much like Judas; however, Jesus extended His love to him!
- 2. Some people have great misconceptions on what this passage tells us to do:
  - a. Doesn't teach to just "overlook" when brethren sin, even when its just against me
  - b. We are given specific commands on how to deal with a brother who sins against us, if we don't follow this, we are wrong! **(Matthew 18:15ff)**
  - c. Sin is still sin and if its not repented of and forgiveness requested, then they go to Hell – Why? Because you loved them too much to say something to them?
- 3. Love based forgiveness is a crucial part of standing together as one! **(Prov 10:12)**
  - a. Love based forgiveness does not dig up sins that have been repented of in an effort to use them against one another... We only see the blood of Christ!
  - b. How can two brethren, when one had greatly wronged the other, work and worship side by side with no bitterness or strife between them? Love covered the sins!
  - c. Never forget Paul's instructions concerning how love behaves **(I Cor 13:5-7)**

### **III. BE HOSPITABLE TO ONE ANOTHER**

#### **A. The next way Peter says we can "circle our wagons" is through hospitality:**

- 1. Very plainly Peter says we are to be hospitable to one another! **(I Peter 4:9)**
  - a. First of all notice this is a command... We cannot dismiss it as a custom of that day or an optional thing... If we fail to be hospitable, then we are sinning!
  - b. We look at God's instructions to be hospitable and we justify ourselves by saying, "Our schedules are too full! Time's have changed!" – That doesn't work for baptism! Why would we try to make that work for hospitality?
  - c. Who does this apply to? ONE ANOTHER! It's not just about being hospitable to those we have common interests with or like the most... but all brethren!
- 2. Christians are supposed to be hospitable to all men... How much more then should we be willing to be hospitable to those who are our own brethren! **(Heb 13:1-3; Gal 6:10)**
  - a. I don't see what in this passage has changed... It would be apparent that he's saying you never know whether or not you are actually entertaining angels!
  - b. See the link between brotherly love and hospitality... Hospitality is one of the most fundamental ways in which we can demonstrate our love for one another!
  - c. We should be especially drawn to our own brethren – These are our family, those we fight the same battles with, and those we share a like precious faith with!
- 3. One thing about hospitality is that it is something you have to pursue! **(Rom 12:13)**
  - a. Being "given" literally means "To Pursue" – It's something you have to go after!

- b. He seems to be saying that we should look for and even create these opportunities
- c. Sometimes people aren't eager to come, at first... Keep trying to have them over!
- 4. Remember, you don't have to have the best provisions to be hospitable! **(2 Kings 4:8-10)**
  - a. What did she have to offer Elisha? A bed, lamp, table, chair, and food! Only the basic things, right? **WRONG!** Her hospitality provided him so much more!
  - b. He received encouragement, friendship, fellowship, love, and support... These are things that money cannot buy... That the nicest provisions cannot provide!
  - c. Sometimes we justify our lack of hospitality by thinking that we cannot provide the absolute best... But hospitality is about so much more than the physical things!
- 5. Our hospitality to one another supports one another when we are in need and draws us closer together so we are stronger as we battle Satan together!

#### **B. We can see a great example of hospitality by studying the Christians in Acts:**

- 1. First of all, remember the context of what Peter is writing about:
  - a. There were going to be facing very difficult times with the coming Roman-Jewish war which would potentially leave many Christians without homes to live in!
  - b. Many would be driven out of their city to look for a new place to live altogether
  - c. This would be an incredibly difficult time for those having to flee Jerusalem... Christians from all over could help by providing the needed hospitality!
- 2. They understood the power of hospitality not only when they were under duress, but also on a regular strictly social basis as well: **(Acts 2:46-47)**
  - a. The book of Acts is a great pattern for making a church grow... An intricate part of this pattern is that the disciples were REGULARLY together!
  - b. Their being together brought them together even more – Promoted unity and fellowship among the saints and tightened their circle of wagons!
  - c. This allowed them to know each other better and become more involved in one another's lives so they knew and were able to help each other in tough times!
- 3. Hospitality also played a very major role when it came to evangelism: **(Acts 20:20-21)**
  - a. The Christians invited Paul and others who could teach the gospel into their homes and invited many who were lost to come hear the good news... Hospitality!
  - b. Hospitality was a huge part of the conversion of Cornelius **(Acts 10:5-6; 23-24)**
  - c. They viewed their homes as tools from God for teaching the lost! Did it cost them, bring strangers into their homes, cause an inconvenience... Of course!

#### **C. While hospitality is a command, it can become wrong if done with the wrong attitude!**

- 1. Peter says to be hospitable, but to be hospitable WITHOUT grumbling! **(1 Peter 4:9)**
  - a. Hospitality does take time, a certain amount of energy, can involve inconvenience, and there is most often a degree of financial involvement
  - b. Some may look at these things and decide that being hospitable isn't worth it, but since it's a command we have no option! Therefore, they do it and complain!
  - c. Some may be hospitable to others solely out of a sense of duty... They don't bring others into their homes because they love them but out of obligation alone
  - d. Others may do it, but grumble and complain about their guests the entire time
- 2. We should have the same attitude toward hospitality we have toward giving: **(2 Cor 9:7)**
  - a. Just as it's not about "How much do I have to give" but "How much can I give" it's not about "How much do I have to open my home" but "How much can I...?"
  - b. I don't do it because I feel like I have to... But because I love my brethren and want to get to know them better! I do it because it's a joy and pleasure for me!
- 3. God give no exact measure – He doesn't say this is how often you are to be hospitable, but by leaving it open to us, he let's us show the level of our love!

### **IV. MINISTER WITH WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN YOU**

#### **A. The final way we can circle our wagons in through ministering to one another:**

- 1. Peter instructs them to use their gifts in service to one another **(vs. 10)**
  - a. Some believe this speaks of miraculous gifts; however, the word does not demand

- that interpretation... It simply means, "Ability" – Applies to any talent we have!
- b.
  2. Notice the source of this gift – It is by what God supplies (**vs. 11**)
    - a. This leaves us no room for any pride or arrogance! I cannot be puffed up about my abilities because God is the reason I have that ability!
    - b. "I am what I am by the grace of God" – A gift from God to be used in His service!
  3. Finally notice our purpose in serving one another – To glorify God! (**vs. 11**)
    - a. Everything a Christian is about should be to bring honor & glory to God! As we make decisions & conduct our lives we should ask, "Does this glorify God?"
    - b. If we cannot answer "YES" to that question... Then we might want to reconsider it!
    - c. Here, our using what talents God has given us is said to bring glory to God!
  4. As they faced the trials of the destruction of Jerusalem and Satan's attacks, they needed one another's help in order to make it through! Everyone was serving each other!

#### **B. Peter certainly could have recalled many lessons Jesus taught him about servitude!**

1. He could have remembered the lessons Jesus taught about stewardship (**Mt 25:14-30**)
  - a. The one talent man reveals the reason why many do not use their abilities to serve others as they could... They are afraid! But fear cost him his soul! (**vs. 28-30**)
  - b. Again we see that everyone has been given abilities by the Lord... He expects us to use our abilities for one major purpose... To bring glory to his name!
  - c. Someone said, "The problem isn't usually getting the 2 or 5 talent people working because they already are... If we could just get the 1 talent people using that one talent then we could turn the world upside down!"
2. Peter learned by example what it means to have a the heart of a servant (**John 13**)
  - a. Here their attitudes reeked! Any one of them had the ability to wash the feet of those present and it was all of their responsibility... But they were too proud!
  - b. Notice particularly Peter's attitude as Jesus washes his feet (**vs. 6**)
  - c. They entered that room thinking they were "lords" and left knowing that they had a different nature and a different mission – To be servants! (**vs. 14**)
3. The greatest lesson of servitude Peter learned happened at the cross! (**Jn 15:12-13**)
  - a. Jesus was willing to give up the most precious thing to serve others – His life!
  - b. There was no bitterness or complaining! He didn't do it out of duty, but out of love!

#### **C. Every single person has talents and opportunities to serve one another!**

1. Remember – There is no insignificant part of the body of Christ! (**I Cor 12**)
  - a. Sometimes people get to thinking that because they don't have the "lime-light" talents their abilities are not important – That's can't be father from the truth!
  - b. The body of Christ is made up of people with many different abilities and levels of abilities... What each one brings is vital to the health of the body as a whole!
  - c. It is true here, as well as everywhere else, that the people who do some of the greatest work are people who are working behind the scenes in seemingly little ways simply faithfully doing what they can in the Lord's work!
2. Whatever ability we may have the point is, "Let us use it!" (**Romans 12:5-8**)
  - a. As we've pointed out before – This list of abilities is very diverse! Some may be miraculous, others are not... But the last is just as important as the first!
  - b. Notice how often Paul emphasizes "JUST DO IT!" – Just use whatever you have!
3. Tabitha is a great example of one who served God in what she probably thought were small ways; however she made a HUGE & eternal impact! (**Acts 9:36, 39**)
4. One day we will have to stand before God and give an account for the abilities He has blessed us with because we are simply stewards! (**I Cor 4:2**)

**CONCLUSION:** One of our greatest defenses against the devil and one of our greatest weapons against him is each other... Let's continue to circle our wagons and help one another in growing toward God!