

### Introduction:

Eight years ago, I witnessed the fall of the World Trade Center towers. Do you remember where you were that day? I was on my way to the office from the Early Bird Café with a breakfast Panini in my stomach, a cup of coffee in my hand, the wind through my windows blowing in my hair, the cd player blaring in my ears when I received a phone call. I was turning from Phelan Avenue on to Dowlen Road in Beaumont, Texas. My friend asked if I'd heard that a plane had flown into one of the World Trade Center towers. I remember thinking, "Oh no! Somebody has messed up bad and is going to be in big trouble." Before I made it to my office, my friend called again. "The second tower has been hit." I thought, "Oh no! This is no accident." I spent that day in horror, like many of you, watching the news on tv and listening to it on the radio as I learned about the attack on the Pentagon and our one victory on United 93, downed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania instead of reaching a target in Washington D.C. When the death toll was finally totaled, 2974 victims died in those attacks. That day changed our nation. Terrorism was no longer something that happened in other countries. It was something that happens to us, right here at home. We wondered, "How could this happen here? How could this happen to us?" Southeast Texas is a petrochemical center. We lived less than three miles from a refinery. For a couple of weeks following the attacks, I heard rumors that we would actually be a primary target for attack because of that. I was scared for my family. I was scared for me. I remember hearing President Bush talk about the attacks. He led us to understand that this was not a random attack of terror. This was war. It was a war like we had never seen. It was a war with a hard to define, elusive enemy. It was a war that would take unprecedented strategies to fight and win. It was a war that, while having decisive victories and defeats, would likely continue as long as we live. Because the enemy is ever present and often hidden, we take some extreme measures to be safe. These extreme measures are not comfortable. In fact, we often complain when going through security in an airport sometimes takes as long or longer than the flight itself. However, if we want to win this war, we have to be on our guard. The fall of the World Trade Center changed us. That was eight years ago.

Eight days ago, via the news, I witnessed another fall, a greater fall. I am grateful the world doesn't know about it yet. But we know about it. Its effects are far more damaging than the loss of life. It is going to translate into lost souls. We will never know the spiritual death toll of this fall. I remember exactly where I was when I first heard of Jody Lusk, a gospel preacher in Auburn, Kentucky. Marita and I were both in our schoolroom. I was taking a break from balancing our checkbook and working on our September budget. Marita was checking her e-mail. "Oh no," she said and read to me an e-mail that described the mysterious disappearance of a gospel preacher. I remember thinking, "Oh, I hope this doesn't turn out to be something bad on his part." But then I quickly rebuked myself for being so cynical and began to pass the news on to others. Then Saturday night, one of the brothers I had told about this disappearance called me and said, "Edwin, I've found something really bad." He directed me via Google to the updated news story. The search for the missing preacher had turned into a manhunt for a fallen Christian who was being charged with the statutory rape of a 13-year-old girl. That moment for me is going to be etched in my mind like Pearl Harbor and the assassination of John F. Kennedy is for many of you. Like the moment I learned about the explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger in 1986, like the moment I learned about the attack on the World Trade Center. 9/11 was a wake-up call for us and for our nation. It warned us of a war we didn't know was taking place. 9/5 needs to be a wake-up call for us and for our church. There is a war going on. We are in the middle of it right now. Think of how silly and dangerous it would have been had President Bush responded to 9/11 by saying, "This was a weird and freak attack. However, I don't think it will amount to much. We don't know how this happened, but we're sure it won't happen again. So, let's just sweep this under the rug and try to act like it didn't happen. Move on about your lives and let's just forget it." Sadly, that is exactly how some Christians want to handle 9/5. "Jody's story is just a weird and freak thing. We don't know how anybody could do that and we're sure it couldn't happen to anyone here. So, let's just sweep this under the rug and try to act like it didn't happen. Move on about your lives and let's just forget it." Brothers and sisters, that is an equally silly and dangerous response. We have been given a warning, a wake-up call that we must not ignore.

## Discussion:

- I. We aren't just playing church; we are at war.
  - A. **Ephesians 6:11-12** describes the war. We are fighting against the devil himself. We are fighting against rulers, against authorities, against cosmic powers of darkness, against spiritual forces of evil. They wish to destroy us. They wish to drag us to the depths of hell. They do not fight fair. They will stop at nothing. You thought Hitler and his Nazi regime was a powerful enemy? You think Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda are wicked enemies? You were wrong.
  - B. **I Peter 5:8** says the devil is prowling about like a roaring lion. He is stalking his prey even as we speak. He does not care who you are. He does not care where you are. He does not care what you have done. He is stalking you. He is stalking your family. He is stalking this congregation.
  - C. **Daniel 10:11-14, 20-21** provides an interesting glimpse at the spiritual war that is taking place behind the scenes. The Israelites were in captivity. Daniel had read the prophesy of Jeremiah about their release and started to pray. After three weeks, he had an encounter with a spiritual being. Some suggest the being was Jesus himself, others an angel. But in any case notice what he talks about. He talks about a battle. It is a battle we can't see. It is a battle Daniel did not know about. This spiritual being was fighting against "the prince of the kingdom of Persia" and only Michael stood with him in that battle. Brothers and sisters, this battle is still taking place today. The spiritual war has not ended. We need to see it and we need to see our part in it.
  - D. This war has been going on since the beginning. When Satan entered the Garden of Eden and tempted Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and then tempted Adam through Eve, the war began. When Cain killed Abel, it continued. When the hearts of men were only evil continually and God sent the flood, the war was raging. When Noah gave into drunkenness, when Abraham lied about his wife, when Moses took the glory for himself, when David committed immorality with Bathsheba, when Judas betrayed Jesus, when Peter denied Jesus, the war was going on. And it is going on strong today. I have been preaching full time for almost 15 years. In that time I have continued to hear about preachers and elders who have committed adultery. Just this week, I've heard about an elder in another congregation who has abandoned his family for another woman and a preacher who is now on trial for trafficking in child pornography. I cannot even begin to count the number of Christians I've known whose families have dissolved for any number of reasons. I've seen multiple Christians taken to jail because of drugs. Art Adams, gospel preacher as well as a professional counselor who works with addicts, told me that anecdotally, as he has travelled and presented his series on dealing with addictions and questioned people, he has found that one in four of Christian men are struggling with pornography. Any time you want, I can talk to you about my own involvement in this war. The war is going on all around us. It's time to quit sweeping it under the rug when evidence of the war slaps us in the face. It is time for us to admit it and step into the fray fighting with the power of God.
- II. Sinners are not the enemy; Satan is the enemy.
  - A. Look at **Ephesians 6:12** again. Notice who we are not fighting. We are not fighting flesh and blood. People are not the enemy. The sinners who perpetrate even great evil and sometimes even against us directly are not really the enemy. In fact, **II Timothy 2:24-26** demonstrates that the people who are doing the devil's will are his prisoners. Please, do not misunderstand; we are each responsible for our sins. Whether we are in a court of man's law or standing before that final judgment seat, we will not be able to hide behind a defense that claims "the devil made me do it." However, as we fight this war we need to understand who is the enemy.
  - B. The enemy is not the people.
    1. There are some in false teaching churches that provide false hope through teaching that mimics truth, comes close to truth, but falls short of truth. While we must certainly reason with and strive to correct teachers of error (**Titus 1:9**), they are not the enemy in this war.
    2. There are some who have fallen prey to such wicked sins that they have seriously hurt and spiritually maimed others by their sinful actions. I don't care how you cut it, that is exactly what our brother, Jody Lusk, has done. While we must certainly rebuke the sinner (**Luke 17:3**), while we must certainly discipline the impenitent who are among us (**I Corinthians 5**), we must recognize they are not the enemy in this war.

3. There are some wolves in sheep's clothing who come in among us, perverting the will of God and leading folks captive (**Acts 20:29-30; II Peter 2:1-3**). While we must certainly rebuke, mark, and withdraw from those who will not turn from these sins (**I Timothy 5:20**), they are not the enemy in this war.
- C. The enemy is Satan. The enemy is sin. The enemies are his wicked spiritual hordes doing his bidding, taking captive the hearts and souls of men to do his will. If we are going to be able to truly fight this battle, we need to see sinful men for what they are. They are not the enemy; they are victims, casualties, prisoners in this war. Like those who suffer from Stockholm Syndrome, they have been with the enemy so long they have given their allegiance to him. These people do not need our condemnation and judgment; they need our help just as we want when we have fallen prey to Satan's schemes. Of course, having said that, I do want to be clear that when sin gets to the level of crime, there will be consequences and punishment rightly administered through the God-ordained government (**Romans 13:1-4**). But that judgment is for the governing authorities to mete out, not us. Our job is to help sinners, no matter how vile their sin, overcome sin through Jesus Christ.
  - D. Further, we must understand who our enemy really is because as long as we think the enemy is false teachers, fallen brethren, and other flawed folks, we will continue to think we can win this war on our own. We will continue to think all we need is our logic and obedience to overcome the enemy. These people are not the enemy. No, the enemy is much, much worse. We can't beat the real enemy. We can't study our Bibles enough to beat the enemy. We can't go to church enough to beat the enemy. We can't win enough debates to defeat the enemy. We can't make enough right choices to defeat the enemy. Before our enemy we are hopeless. If we don't come to grips with our own poverty of spirit in this battle, we will lose our souls (**Matthew 5:3**).
- III. If we are not careful, we will be victims in the battle as well.
- A. What saddens me the most about Jody Lusk's fall is the way I know Satan will use it in the hearts and minds of non-Christians and Christians alike. Sadly, many of the non-Christians who hear about this story will find in it the excuse to stay away from Jesus. "If a Christian will do something that wicked, why become one?" they will say, "I'm doing better than that on my own." However, the ramifications for many Christians will be no less drastic. Many Christians who have heard of this sin are saying, "I know I've done some bad stuff, but at least I haven't done that. I would never do that."
  - B. **I Corinthians 10:12** is a warning for us all. "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." Instead of letting Jody's sin be a cause for us to glory in our own power, we need to let it be a warning of the power of sin. **Romans 7:8, 14-24** explains sin's power. Here was Paul, a Pharisee before becoming a Christian and an apostle after. Yet, he explains that sin entered his life and took over, causing him to commit coveting of every kind. He wanted to do right, but he sinned anyway. Sin had dominated him just as Jesus had warned in **John 8:34**. "Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin." Sin is not satisfied to simply cause us to stumble. It wants to destroy and dominate us. It will take us farther than we imagined. Let Jody's fall be a warning to each of us. I have heard his interview. Seven months ago if he had heard a story like this, he would have sat in judgment on the wicked, awful pervert who would commit such a heinous sin and crime. He would have scoffed saying, "I will never do that." But now he sits in jail wondering how he became the wicked awful pervert who did the unthinkable. Understand this, we must not be shaking our fists declaring that we would never commit such a sin as this, rather we should be shaking in our boots that sin is so powerful as to destroy anyone of us like this.
  - C. But there is another side of this that we need to see. Call it the tale of two Pharisees. Read **Luke 7:36-50; 18:9-14**. These two Pharisees trusted in themselves that they were righteous. They counted on the fact that they had not committed any of the biggies. They rested in their routine, religious rituals. They had not committed the sins of this sinful woman (considered by most to be a prostitute) or this tax collector (viewed by other Jews as a scum-of-the-earth traitor to their people and their God). They were certain they would never commit those sins. But here is the kicker. They didn't have to. Satan already had them. Pushing them further into sin might break their pride and cause them to look for the mercy they needed. Understand this, it may be that Satan and sin never push you to do something as horrific as Jody Lusk has done. Satan

may not need to push you that far. He may only need to push you to the point of arrogantly claiming you are better than Jody. If we take personal comfort from Jody's story that we are okay because at least we haven't done that and we never will, Satan has us right where he wants us. We are wounded and dying and we likely don't even know it.

- D. We need to see the frightening reality of **Romans 3:9-18**. Look at what God says about sinners. None is righteous, their throat is an open grave, the venom of asps is under their lips, their feet is swift to shed blood, the way of peace they have not known. Brothers and sisters, God is not saying when we have done these really bad things, then we are sinners. He is saying when we have sinned, this is what we look like to Him. I understand that when it comes to earthly consequences there are some sins greater than others, but we need to understand that the utter revulsion we feel as we hear about and consider Jody's sin of sexual immorality and statutory rape is the same feeling God has when he sees our gossip, pride, arrogance, slander, malice, unkindness, outbursts of wrath, hatred, lust, pornography, lying, gluttony, greed, unforgiving hearts, etc.
- E. If we are not careful, we will be victims of this war as well. Let us heed the warning God has allowed each of us through this man's sin so that we might humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and resist the devil by God's strength and grace (**I Peter 5:6-9**).

IV. We need to know that God has already won the victory through Jesus Christ. That is where we will win the victory.

- A. Right now, it may seem that what we have been talking about is pretty bleak. And it is. I hope spiritually you feel somewhat like you did nationally on September 11, 2001. I hope you have a healthy respect for the power of our enemy. I hope you have a healthy fear for your own spiritual safety. I hope you have a healthy humility about your own weakness and powerlessness. However, this is where our analogy breaks down. The fact is, we don't know how the war on terror will end. For all we know, it may be that radical Islamic jihadists eventually defeat the United States. However, we know who has won the spiritual war. God will win. God has already won.
- B. When Paul wrote the despairing cry, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (**Romans 7:24**), he had an answer. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (**Romans 7:25**). In the beginning, God foretold that Satan, that serpent of old, would bruise the heel of the seed of woman, but the seed of woman would crush his head (**Genesis 3:15**). That victory has already been won. While **Revelation 19:11-21; 20:7-10** may be about a victory God gave His people years ago, the picture still provides us with the truth about God's power and victory. Satan is no match for God. Jesus has won the victory.
- C. We need to see what this means for our lives on a practical, day-to-day battle level. The question is not who will win this war. The question is how do we stay on the winning side every day. If we want victory, it is in Jesus. Only when we stay in Jesus can we cry along with Paul, "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (**I Corinthians 15:57**). We have to stay connected to God the Father, we have to stay connected to Jesus, we have to stay connected to the Spirit of God. If we do not, Satan will stalk us, spring upon us, and devour us. Sadly, sometimes we may not even know it.
- D. We need to understand that half-measures will not avail us in this battle. We will need to take extreme measures that are not always pleasant and easy. We must seek first God's kingdom and righteousness (**Matthew 6:33**). We must hunger and thirst for righteousness above all other passions and desires (**Matthew 5:6**). We must abandon our own wills for that of Jesus, living by faith in Him (**Galatians 2:20**). We must take up our cross every day, sacrificing ourselves to the will of God (**Luke 9:23**). We must cast off everything that makes us stumble (**Matthew 5:29-30**). We must let God chisel away at us, removing everything that does not reflect Him, proving and refining us by fiery trials (**I Peter 1:6-7**).
- E. We must improve our congregational culture and our motivation for what we do. If we are only playing church, it will avail us nothing. We will meet every week as a prelude to eternity in hell. We must band together as a battalion of God's army, fighting together to protect and preserve each other in this battle. No longer can we view prayer, Bible study, assemblies, Gospel meetings, Bible classes, small groups, hospitality as burdens we must buckle under when made to feel guilty as if they are checklist items to mark off while we try to be good enough to go to

heaven. Absolutely not. These are part of the war. These are the means by which we fight the good fight of faith. These are the means by which we connect to God and His army, allowing us the strength to overcome. We don't do things as a church because they are cool or neat. We must do them because without them we cannot win the war. And winning this war over sin and Satan must be our absolute priority. If we let anything take precedence, it will destroy us and we will have no one to blame but ourselves. We can only win if we come into Jesus, stay in Jesus, and live in Jesus.

**Conclusion:**

We are at war. You are at war. Satan is warring to take ownership of your soul. He is pursuing you with everything he can. Please, don't think that because you haven't done something as awful as Jody Lusk that your soul is okay. It isn't. If you are not in Jesus Christ, you are in your sins and the wages of those sins is spiritual and eternal death (**Romans 6:23**) and you will be cast away from the presence of God for eternity, suffering the punishment of eternal destruction when Jesus comes to be glorified among His saints (**II Thessalonians 1:7-8**).

On the other hand, please don't think that if you have done something as awful as Jody Lusk, or perhaps even worse, that there is no hope for you. **Romans 5:6-11** explains that even while sinners and enemies of God, He sent Jesus to die for our sins to reconcile us to Himself. I want you to understand what that says. On that dark day while Jesus was on trial, He knew the sin Jody Lusk would commit but He went to the cross for him anyway. He knew the sins you would commit and He went to the cross for you anyway. Don't let His death be in vain for you. Come into Jesus right now. **Romans 6:3-4** says that we can enter Christ, we can enter His death, we can enter His grace by being buried with Him in baptism. Can we help you with that right now?