

Heart of Worship: “En Guard!”

A sermon based on 2 Timothy 1:9b-14

Do you know a fencer? Not the kind who puts up fences around people's property, but the kind who wears the fancy white uniform and mask and swings a sword around for some swashbuckling fun? While it may not get the publicity of football or basketball, it's an interesting sport, isn't it?

In modern fencing the mask and lame' (or "armor" to the average layperson) is made of a thin metal mesh and is connected to a small battery box clipped to the fencer's back. When the foil (that's the fancy word for the "sword") connects to the lame' the circuit is complete and a buzzer sounds, marking the hit and ensuring no cheating. I guess that beats watching for blood.

But one part of fencing that's interesting is before you begin attacking your opponent, fencing etiquette mandates that you first warn him. The French phrase, "En guard!" [pronounced "On gar!" (no "d" sound in French)] is cried out to tell your enemy to be "on his guard," before you try to symbolically skewer him.

Wouldn't it be nice if every enemy of the Gospel would always cry "En guard!" before they launched an attack? Wouldn't it be nice if your atheist co-worker would cry, "En guard!" before he launched an attack on Christianity? Wouldn't it be nice if the liberal "Christian" would cry, "En guard!" before questioning a Biblical doctrine? Wouldn't it be nice if the TV warning didn't just say "M" for mature audiences, but "U" for unproductive use of your time? Wouldn't it be nice if a little buzzer would sound when you've been hit with pride or jabbed with laziness that causes you to be the obstacle to the proclamation of the Gospel?

Unfortunately the enemy is far craftier than that. He won't announce when an attack is about to come. But he loves to use a sneak attack and stab you in the back when you're looking the other way. For that reason, we need to always be "En guard!" That's the encouragement that the Apostle Paul gives us in our text for this morning...

Now, looking at those words, In a sense, the apostle is shouting to his vicar, Timothy, "En guard!" Be on your guard to protect your faith. Be on your guard to keep the deposit that was entrusted to you. Be on your guard as you face the jabs and the stings of the enemy and as you face the persecution and suffering that he brings. For he will do all he can, not just to buzz your alarm, but to skewer your faith!

And we need to be on guard too to protect the Gospel that's been entrusted to us...

A few years ago, author Dan Brown wrote his best seller called, *Inferno*, where a supervillain creates a virus that will take thousands of lives. And the unlikely hero, a professor of history and art, has to solve the mystery and stop the mad man.

Now can you imagine if instead of a virus that brought death, you and I had in our possession the opposite: a cure for death itself, a magic elixir of sorts that puts a stopper in death, a fountain of youth, immortality in a jar?! Well, you don't have to imagine. We have the Gospel!

Paul says, ***"Our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher."***

And so were you. Before the beginning of time, God chose you not just to be his own, but to be a herald of the Gospel. We have the cure to death and we get to disperse it every day—in a conversation with a co-worker or neighbor, in a Facebook post or an email, in a question lobbed your way out of the blue, we get to distribute immortality to others.

But make no mistake: the enemy is more relentless than any supervillain in any of Dan Brown's novels. He will stop at nothing to keep that cure from reaching others. He will do all within his power to prevent them from hearing the one thing that will save them from death itself and from the hell that will follow.

And sadly, we too often help him.

Oh, we may not actively persecute Christians. We may not seek to silence the gospel. But we help the enemy achieve his goal every time we let down our guard. We help him out every time we're so guarded of our own comfort or reputation that we don't risk persecution for the sake of getting the cure out!

There are more than just points and buzzers at stake in this game. There are people's eternal souls. This demands our very best efforts at getting the cure out and our very best efforts to stay on guard to watch for the enemy. Because when we let our guard down, we risk losing so much!

Can you imagine if you were the guard in a watch tower and fell asleep on the job right before the enemy attacked? What if you sounded no warning? What if the city were taken because you let down your guard?!

God told the prophet, Ezekiel, ***"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood."*** (Ezekiel 3:17-18)

When we let down our guard, we don't just risk losing the souls entrusted to us. We risk losing our faith. We risk losing our own souls. So "En guard!" dear friends, "En Guard!"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, Pastor!" I hear you say, "That's a lot of pressure you're putting on us, isn't it?" It is. It's the pressure every Christian faces. It's the pressure of God's Law that always calls us to be better!

But of course, you know there's good news too. News that not only alleviates the pressure, but completely removes it. How could Paul pass off this monumental task to Timothy—a task that would require Timothy to suffer? Because Paul and Timothy were not alone in the fight against the enemy.

And neither are we.

"I know whom I have believed," Paul boldly declared. And you know him too. He's the one who already defeated the enemy. He's the one who lived a perfect life, always on his guard, always armed with the Word, always faithful in prayer. He's the one who willingly took the blame and took the punishment for every time that we've slept on the job or let down our guard. He took the jabs. He took the nails. He took the sword. He took the hell.

And we have been rescued. Our sin has been paid for. Our apathy and negligence, our carelessness and unfaithfulness, our every sin is gone.

We have been rescued from hell. Death has been destroyed for us. We have immortality though, ***"our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."***

And now, he not only entrusts us with the most precious gift in the universe, that very Gospel that gives life and immortality to all who believe it, he didn't abandon us with the task. We're not on our own in the fight. We have help. We have the biggest, baddest, toughest, strongest help there is: We have our Savior and we know he will guard us.

"I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day."

Have you ever wondered what exactly it was Paul entrusted to Jesus? Was it his hurting body as he knew that in that day it would be restored and glorified? Was it his life as he knew that in that day he would live again? Was it his faith as he was confident God would keep it alive until his death? Was it his soul as he trusted in Jesus to take him home? Was it his congregations as he trusted that Jesus would care for them when Paul no longer could?

Perhaps the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to be intentionally vague about what exactly he entrusted to Jesus, because maybe he meant all of it. "Whatever I entrust to Jesus, I am convinced that he is able to guard it." Jesus will always be "En guard."

And that's certainly true of us too. What we entrust to Jesus is safer than it would be inside of a lock box inside of a safe inside of Fort Knox (the one in Kentucky) with a team of 100 marines guarding it. What we entrust to Jesus will always be safe because Jesus is always "En guard."

And what's more, it's not just Jesus who's guarding what we entrust to him. It's the Holy Spirit too who guards what's been entrusted to us. Paul told Timothy, ***"Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us."*** Whether that "good deposit" is the Gospel or the faith which that Gospel brings, we know that the Holy Spirit will keep it safe and always be "En guard."

So with Jesus and the Holy Spirit guarding us and guarding our faith, the pressure is off—even while we fight the enemy and do all we can to stay on guard—because we know who wins in the end. Jesus does. And we do too.

Will we suffer in the meantime? Sure! All of God's people do. The enemy won't give up. We will face ridicule and slander, maybe physical persecution and pain, maybe we'll be martyred for the sake of the Gospel. But we're not ashamed to suffer. We know whom we have believed. And we are convinced he will guard the Gospel for us. In life, through death, and into eternity. And we know that the Holy Spirit who lives in us will guard our faith until that day.

So, finally, we will continue to guard the Gospel with his help. And we have the equipment and the tools we need to do, right here it: not a lame' or a foil, not a spear or a sword, or a gun. But we have sermons like these. We have Bible Classes and devotion books. And of course, we have the Word itself. We have our Baptisms. We have Jesus' very body and blood in the Lord's Supper.

These will help us be "on guard" as we keep our focus on Christ and on him crucified for us. These will help us guard what has been entrusted to us so we continue to ***"watch [our] life and doctrine closely, [to] persevere in them... [so we] will save both [ourselves] and [our] hearers."*** (1 Timothy 4:16) And a great way to continue building our guard? You're here. You're doing it. You come to a place here, where God's Word and the gospel of Jesus Christ is the star of the show...where it's on display in our music, in our readings, in our responses, in our sermons. Don't give that up!

And finally, rejoice that you're not alone in the fight. Entrust your body and soul, your faith and your life, your church, your ministry and your witness all to Jesus. And he will guard what we entrust to him until that day. The Holy Spirit will guard the faith that's been deposited in you and the faith he deposits into others through you. They will keep you safe to the very end! So "En guard!" dear friends, "En guard!" Amen.