

LESSONS FROM A GENERAL

General Jonathan Wainwright was the only U.S. general captured by the enemy during World War II. He was left behind in Corregidor by General MacArthur, and instructed to fight to the end. Wainwright, however, was ultimately forced to surrender. He was surrounded by overwhelming, massive, and merciless destruction. Against his convictions he turned over what was left of his rag tag army to the Japanese. These POWs were shipped to prison camps in Asia and thousands died in transit. Wainwright himself ended up in a POW camp in Mongolia where he was carefully guarded as precious prize and trophy.

During those years of captivity Wainwright labored under tremendous guilt. He felt like a total failure because he had surrendered. His body deteriorated from starvation and disease, and limped so badly that he walked with a cane.

In due time, as you know, MacArthur returned to the Philippines. Repeated victories forced Japan to retreat, and ultimately to surrender. Japan was totally defeated and their surrender was unconditional. Since Mongolia was so far from Tokyo they were among the last to receive the news.

Can you not picture the Japanese commander watching Wainwright after he knew that his government had surrendered? Once this news was known, the two men would change places. General Wainwright would take command and the Japanese officer would become his prisoner. For this reason, the Japanese tried to keep the Americans from finding out the truth. They were free men, but didn't know it. They had authority, but didn't know it. These emaciated, dysentery-plagued, soldiers were victors. They had won the war! They had the right to good food, clean clothes, and power over their enemies! As long as they didn't know this, however, they behaved like prisoners.

Finally the day came when General Wainwright found out the truth. Armed with this information he limped to the commandant's office. He opened the door, and without even raising his voice, asserted, "My commander in chief has defeated your commander in chief. I am in command now. You must surrender." Without firing a shot the emaciated, physically handicapped POW took command of well fed, heavily armed Japanese soldiers. The truth had set him free!

When General Wainwright was flown to Japan for the formal ceremony of surrender, he dreaded facing MacArthur. He felt like a total failure and wanted to hide in the corner. When they finally came face to face General Wainwright broke down and was overwhelmed by tears. MacArthur reached out to him, embraced him, and simply said, "It is okay. You fought well."

At the signing ceremony only two generals stood by MacArthur while the others stayed in the background. To his left was British General Percival who had surrendered Singapore at the beginning of the war. On his right was General Jonathan Wainwright who had surrendered Corregidor. After the ceremony was over MacArthur handed a pen to each of these men, as if to say, "You did your best. Don't be too hard on yourselves. We have won."

There is, of course, a spiritual application to this story. The devil has been defeated, but if you don't know that you are apt to behave like a prisoner. In Rev. 12:11 we are told that our victory over Satan comes through the blood of the Lamb, the word of our testimony, and because we do not love our lives so much as to shrink from death. We cannot improve upon the blood of the Lamb. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. We can, however, improve upon the word of our testimony. It not only means witnessing to other human beings on earth, it also involves a testimony to the principalities and power in heavenly places (Eph. 3:10). This testimony is most effective when we are willing to die in order to proclaim it.

We are no longer prisoners to sin and slaves of the devil. We have been redeemed! We know the truth and the truth has set us free!

(Adapted from the book *“That None Should Perish”* by Ed Silvano)