

## Chaplain

This is a partial and edited transcript of a sermon given on Sunday 28 April 1996 to the congregation of The Kirk of The Hills Presbyterian Church in Kirkwood, Missouri.

The introduction by the pastor was as follows:

“Colonel David Peterson, born in South Dakota of Christian parents and raised in a wonderful Christian home, graduated from Covenant College in 1962. From there he went on to Covenant Seminary and graduated in 1965. Then he immediately entered active duty in the US Army. During his thirty-year career there he has enjoyed great distinction: advancing not only in rank but earning many honors along the way. He has also continued his education to enhance his service as a minister of Jesus Christ in the Chaplain’s Corps.

During operation Desert Shield/Storm he was the highest-ranking military chaplain in service and advisor to General Norman Schwarzkopf upon graduation (actually retirement but we said graduation when we heard about it). In 1965 he was elected the Executive Director of The Presbyterian and Reformed Chaplain’s Commission. As such, he oversees the lives of two hundred plus military missionaries of the Chaplain’s Corps. We have one hundred and six PCA chaplains in the military forces. What a great military opportunity for sharing the Gospel. They have shared with me this morning that since January 1 we have gained nine new chaplains for that branch of military service.

Dave and his wife Sandy have three children. They have returned to his native South Dakota and make their home near Sturgis. Men, he has invited us to come and go pheasant hunting. We cannot all go at once so you must sign up in the narthex after the service. Dave, we welcome you to The Kirk of The Hills. We are eagerly anticipating your challenge to God and His Word.”

Colonel Dave Peterson speaking:

“...Well I am indeed honored that you’d come out this morning. I am blessed and inspired that you are here. It’s a privilege to come and represent the chaplainry and to tell you about the things of the chaplainry. I just feel good that I have the privilege of being up with you--up early in the morning.

I thank you for getting up and coming up early, which reminds me, have you ever noticed how often we use that word ‘up’? I think I have a tendency sometimes to use it just as filler like we would use ‘ah’. We are always using the word ‘up’. I listen sometimes and I notice people also use that ‘up’ almost as much as I do. We use it all the time. I can understand why we would use the word ‘up’ when we look up towards the sky, when we are referring up the map or to the top of a list. When we awaken, why is it that we wake up? Why not just

awaken? When we stand, why do we stand up rather than just stand? We tear up. We tell people to cheer up. We get up early every morning. We fix up the house rather than just fix it. We drive up to Uncle Joe's. We polish up the silverware rather than just polish it. We are always 'upping'. Did you ever notice that? We up all the time. Why is it that when we get on a horse we say 'giddy up'? What does 'giddy up' mean? Why is it that babies spit up rather than just spit? Have you ever thought of that? We tidy up the house. We crank up the car. Our kids get out of line and we say 'shape up'. We 'Re-up' in the military instead of calling it re-enlisting. We are always up and I can understand some of it. If we are trying to teach the language to somebody that never heard it, I suspect it would be somewhat complicated. For example, tell that person who never heard the English language and is just learning that you have to get up early in the morning so you can be the first one in the office to open it up. Then you have to stay late so you can lock it up. I mean we are always 'upping'. We are. We stay up late and we do all kinds of things. Well, I looked up that word in the dictionary, by the way, and I noticed it took up three fourths of a page just to define. I am going to stop my little rendition on 'up' here before you get fed up and tell me to shut up about it. I do want to raise you up this morning and I hope I do not hiccup while doing it.

I am here this morning to talk about this God who says: 'they shall mount up with wings,' 'as they go they shall run and not be weary' and 'they shall walk and not be faint.' Now I want to read from my background scripture a passage from chapter two of I Thessalonians. I am not going to have an exegetical sermon this morning and I say that not necessarily apologetically but just to let you know. I know that you are used to great expository preaching here and I am going to be talking more on the topical line because I want to tell you a little bit about the chaplainry. I did want to read us a background scripture, I Thessalonians 2:1-12 and 19-20.

NIV 'You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of opposition. For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who test our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed--God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals

with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.'

My favorite theme in scripture is the providence of God. The purpose of God in every providence is the revelation of God in redemption of His Glory. All of redemptive history is a story of a 'sweet and bitter' prophecy. He was speaking from the book of Ruth. He providentially led me, He works His will and God has a plan. Being in Fort Bragg in 1985 in the 0-6 Colonel Chaplain slot, airborne with my A and B (winter and summer) bag packed, never knowing when we hit the green ramp on our C-130 transports or if we are going to war or alert is exciting. Let me tell you!

We had one hundred and sixty to two hundred chaplains in our Corps in Desert Shield and Desert Storm. In August we had some rumblings and soon the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry went on alert and then they were over there. I knew we were in for something. You have no idea how large the 24<sup>th</sup> is and when 7<sup>th</sup> Corps (The day after election they started to ship eight-hundred railroad cars were unloaded in the Northern ports of West Germany and sent by ship to our command) of USUAR went on alert, I knew then something was up.

In August, I found myself in the country of Saudi Arabia. My first job in Central Command was to write the policy for the AOR (area of responsibility). We were not able to wear our branch insignia of the cross and we were not going to be able to take wine into the country. I was supposed to plan this for all the denominations and there are a significant number of denominations that require the use of wine for the sacrament and we're going to have to operate differently. I said: 'No, No. Wait a minute, freedom of religion, etc.' I thought this was going to be a two or three day operation to staff this?! When you staff a paper like this, you always have to staff it with a staff before you send it up to the General to sign. If you have non-concurrences you work those out and I was getting nothing but non-concurrences. We were fighting and hassling and I was running to the Chief of Staff who was tired of me. About the fifth day, a rabbi in one of our local installations accepted an interview with the BBC. He was excited, because he was the rabbi for the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry. (FYI: You know that people in Saudi Arabia are highly sensitive about their religion. Their traditions are very important to them. The King of Saudi Arabia is the keeper of the faith, and so you know you have the whole Arab world looking upon him as such. There is Mohammed. There are two holy sites of Mecca and Medina. There is pressure, lots of pressure.) In the interview he says that for the first time since the seventh century there will be a rabbi on Saudi Arabia soil. He is already there. He says for the first time in thirteen centuries this rabbi will blow the Ram's Horn and initiate Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. He also said a few more things. The

very next day, all the major newspapers picked up the interview. It was rebroadcast on Israeli TV and radio, where all the Arabs got the news of this rabbi under my command.

The General and his staff were waiting for me the next morning and they were all upset. I can remember the J5's saying the chaplains were going to mess it up for everyone. 'You are going to wind up with not one chaplain here' they said. I was a little shook and went to the local PCA chaplain at nine and then arrived at headquarters to hear: 'The E.F. Hutton of Central Command is looking for you.' They had been unable to find me and General Schwarzkopf did not have a lot of patience with that. They told me it would be a good idea if I would tell them where I was going from now on. I walked into the General's office. I saluted and he rose out of his chair. He did not even return the salute. He said: 'You have the King on the ceiling.' I could not understand but to make a long story short, I did not have to ask because we proceeded to have a half hour and one-way discussion (ass chewing time). He told me what happened as follows: the interview was picked up by the London Jewish Chronicle and Israeli radio and was rebroadcast to most of the Arab world. That made the King mad. I saw actual portions of the translation that was given to the King. The General was very upset. 'Nobody knows if the Arab Coalition is going to hold together because it is touchy. The Koran forbids Arab to fight Arab. It also forbids Arabs to fight infidels. The Mullah found some technical thing in the Koran, but I do not know what it was. It certainly forbids Arab men to fight alongside infidel women. I mean, we are breaking all kinds of their rules. Whether or not the coalition will hold together is tentative at this time.' While I was in his office the General was receiving calls: Secretary of Defense Howard Baker, General Powell and even two calls from President Bush. I mean to tell you the General was under a whole lot of pressure. I cannot even convey to you the situation but suffice it to say he was in a pressure cooker. After a while he calmed down and concluded his half hour remarks by saying: 'There are three things that can go wrong here, that can cause this whole thing to come unraveled. One of them is in the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry right here on Saudi soil. Now get out there and keep your chaplains under control.' As I was walking out the door after saluting he said: 'Dave, you make sure that all my troops have the opportunity to practice their faith.'

By the providence of God, 10,000 accepted Jesus Christ during that campaign thanks to the Holy Spirit. Praise be to God. Amen."

Written permission given 24 November MM by Colonel David Peterson to reproduce the above true story. George