

"Sunken Truth"

TWO WEEKS AGO THE WORD "KURSK" would have meant nothing to most of us. Today, a majority of Americans could probably identify it as the name of the Russian submarine, which sank in the Barents Sea. 118 sailors were on board, and none of them survived. Since the first reports of the tragedy on August 14, people from around the world have prayed that the men on the vessel might somehow be safe. But now we know they weren't.

SUBMARINES, IN GENERAL, ARE BUILT TOUGH. Often descending to great depths in the oceans, they are subjected to incredible pressures from the tons of water overhead. This accounts for the cylindrical shape of submarines, a design that is impervious to pressures that would otherwise twist thick steel as if it were putty.

IT'S EVEN MORE SURPRISING THAT A RUSSIAN SUBMARINE sank. According to information in "U.S. News & World Report" (August 28, 2000), Russia has long built their submarines with double hulls. American submarines, according to the article, run much quieter in the water. It is assumed that Americans would have the advantage of the first attack. Thus, Russia has constructed their underwater fleet to be especially durable. They can withstand much from outside forces.

SO WHY DID THIS SUBMARINE SINK? ALL IS PRELIMINARY speculation at this point, but one guess is that there were two explosions from within the ship. Apparently the explosion occurred somewhere near the torpedo compartment. The force of the pressure from within was more than the vessel could withstand.

IT'S IRONIC THAT A SUBMARINE BUILT TO WITHSTAND strong external attack was sunk by an internal force. But there are lessons here that can help us in other areas of life.

SOMEONE ONCE WONDERED (IN A HUMOROUS VEIN) about Noah's ark. Assuming there were at least two of every land creature on board, how did Noah deal with the termites, or the woodpeckers? The thought is that the ark was built to endure the turbulent waters of the flood, but did anyone anticipate the danger posed from within?

I'VE HEARD IT ILLUSTRATED IN ANOTHER WAY. The person suggested that a glass beaker could be submerged deep into the water, down where the pressures of the water are immense, and it would remain intact. However, if a small steel marble were placed inside the same beaker and only gently shaken, the glass container would shatter. Again, it illustrates that inner forces can sometimes be more destructive than the forces from without. But do we plan for such possibilities?

OUR HEARTS GO OUT TO THE FAMILIES OF THESE Russian victims. Perhaps the sailors felt safe from enemy attack inside their double-hulled vessel. But did they realize the danger that resided within? Did they take precautions against their submarine being critically damaged in this way?

GOD'S WORD WARNS US OF SIMILAR DANGERS from within. There are at least a couple of ways this principle can be applied.

FIRST, THERE IS THE DANGER OF DAMAGE to a community from within, whether it is a civic body or a religious one. My home state of Kentucky has as its official motto "United we stand, divided we fall". That truth recognizes that individuals who bind themselves together are a force to be reckoned with. The Preacher, long before Kentucky was a state, declared the same truth: "Though one may be

overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken."
(Ecclesiastes 4:12) There is strength in numbers -- if those numbers are united with a common purpose.

BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN STRIFE BEGINS to break out within that community? The numbers are still there, but the strength is not the same. Jesus said it before Abraham Lincoln did: ". . . every city or house divided against itself will not stand." (Matthew 12:25) Forces from outside may attack that community, and they may fail in their efforts to break through. But once the internal unity begins to break down, the ability to remain intact begins to disappear.

THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA WAS BUILT to defend that nation against enemies. It was deliberately built so high as to keep attackers from climbing over, and so thick as to prevent it from being broken down. But in the first 100 years of the existence of the Great Wall, China was invaded three times. No one broke down the wall. In each case, the enemy bribed the gatekeepers to open the gates. While much emphasis had been placed on outward security, no one paid adequate attention to inner integrity and loyalty.

A SECOND APPLICATION OF THIS PRINCIPLE of inner danger focuses more on the individual. Have you noticed that humans, as a rule, are pretty tough? In fact, it is downright amazing how much a person can endure. Evidence of that can be found among the survivors of the Holocaust or prisoners of war. Some who endured years of physical torture and humiliation returned to a seemingly normal and productive life after liberation. People can be awfully resilient.

BUT THERE ARE STORIES OF OTHERS WHO DIDN'T endure. Some returned to their homes after liberation as mere shadows of their former selves. They endured the same horrors that others endured, but these could not seem to recover. What made the difference? Was it something about their inner makeup?

I DON'T CLAIM TO HAVE ANSWERS TO THESE questions about survivors of trauma. But I do know what the Bible says about inner strengthening. Paul, for example, offered a prayer that Christians would "be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man" (Ephesians 3:16). I also know of the statement in Proverbs 4:23: "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life."

MANY WITHIN OUR SOCIETY PLACE GREAT EMPHASIS, (and rightly so) on physical strength and health. By exercising regularly and eating properly, a person is more likely to fend off many illnesses. But how many give as much emphasis to strengthening the inner person? And what are the consequences of not fortifying our lives from within?

A SUBMARINE LIES ON THE OCEAN FLOOR BECAUSE it did not have adequate protection from internal explosions. Is there an inner weakness within me that makes me vulnerable to the pressures of life? What am I going to do about it?

WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT how to strengthen your inner person? Get in touch and let's talk about the strength that can be found in God's word. Like vitamins for the soul, His word can do us great good!

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