

The Battlefield

Ephesians 6:10-20

DT: Battle fearlessly.

We've come to the end of Ephesians, and we've covered a lot of ground in this book. Paul's final words read more like an army commander rousing his men for battle than an imprisoned apostle's graceful goodbye. His final words in this letter remind us that the Christian life is a battlefield. If you haven't figured that out by now you are either very young in your faith, or perhaps you have never actually stepped onto this spiritual battlefield. The battlefield and specifically how we approach it is what our text is about today. Let's pray.

PRAY

Make no mistake church, Satan is out to get us. Church we need help. We have an enemy, and he is deceptive, he is intelligent, and he is sneaky. Too often our picture of Satan is this red cartoon character with a pitchfork and a pointy tail. We need to understand what we're up against. You guys who have been around here for a while know that I prefer to describe Satan as a dragon, because that's how scripture describes him, especially in Revelation.

Sometimes that dragon hides in places we don't see, but more and more it seems like the dragon is able to hide in plain sight. You need to know that Satan is fine with those who want to watch from the sidelines. If you ride the pine, if you sit on the bench and never get into the game, never step on the spiritual battlefield that's just fine with him. Satan loves apathetic Christians; lukewarm Christians is how Jesus puts it in Revelation 3. The church in Laodicea was lukewarm, apathetic about their faith. Jesus had no use for Christians like that. They don't do anything for the kingdom, so Jesus said I'm going to spit you out of my mouth.

The Laodiceans thought because they were rich, because they had acquired great wealth, because they didn't need a thing, that meant God was pleased with them and had blessed them. Do you remember how God actually saw them? Wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. Why did God see them that way? Because they never stepped onto the battlefield.

In Ephesians Paul doesn't even address the issue of whether or not you're involved in the battle, he just assumes that if you follow Christ this is what you will do, and this is what you should expect, and this is how you battle fearlessly. Some of my favorite movies or mini series have great battle scenes. One of my favorites is Gladiator. Towards the end of the movie Maximus fights by himself. He fights a famous retired gladiator and then eventually the emperor. But at the very beginning of the movie, he is still the commander of the army and he fights alongside his men.

As he rides through the ranks you can see the men respect him and he acknowledges and appreciates them as well. As he leaves to join and lead the cavalry, which will end up flanking the enemy, he shakes the hand of his captain with the phrase, "Strength and Honor." I always thought that would be a much better way to greet other men. Instead of "how you do'in" or "how's it going" we should greet each other by saying "strength and honor."

Once Maximus makes it over to the cavalry hiding in the woods ready to flank the enemy he gives a short speech. He tells them to "hold the line. Stay with me" and then ends it by saying, "Brothers, what we do in life, echoes in eternity." Paul still says it better here in Ephesians but as we approach the text this morning I do want to remind you that this battlefield we fight on; this spiritual battle we engage in, is not meant to be fought alone. Gladiators typically fought by themselves; soldiers of Christ should never do that. We hold the line together. We stay with one another, because what we do on this spiritual battlefield really does affect eternity.

Paul encourages us to engage in the battle fearlessly, but he wants to make sure we are equipped for the struggle. His first encouragement is to be strong and stand up.

1. Be strong and stand up.

This reminder to be strong is echoed all throughout scripture. David tells his son Solomon twice to be strong. Once as he gave Solomon the plans for the temple in 1 Chronicles 28 and again in 1 Kings 2 when David was dying. In 2 Samuel 10 Joab sees that Israel is surrounded and after laying out his strategy for the battle he tells the Israelite army to be strong and fight bravely for their people and their God. God actually uses this phrase "be strong" as he speaks through Moses to Israel as they are about to take the land in Deuteronomy 11. Then perhaps the most well known "be strong" in all of scripture is found in Joshua 1 where God tells Joshua 3 times repeatedly "be strong and courageous".

Paul borrows that language from the OT when he says in Ephesians 6:10-12, "A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places."

Paul encourages us to be strong and stand up. Be strong in the Lord because the only way to win these battles is with the Lord's help. We can't and shouldn't do it alone, it's something we ought to do together. But we also shouldn't engage the battlefield without God and his mighty power on our side.

Along with that encouragement to be strong is the reminder to stand up and stand firm against all the strategies of Satan. Here soon the elders, deacons, and staff will begin to work on a 3-year strategy for the church. We think through a strategy for how to grow, and care for this church because Satan has a strategy too. We need to stand up against that with one of our own.

The clash with evil is inevitable if you step on the battlefield. Paul is clear that this battle is fought in the spiritual realm with spiritual weapons which he will address next. To battle fearlessly we need to be strong in the Lord. It's his strength not ours. With that strength we stand against Satan. To stand against is a military word that means to resist the enemy, hold the position, or offer no surrender.

One of my favorite passages in all of scripture is 1 Corinthians 16:13 which says, "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong."

Both things we need to battle fearlessly are in that short verse. Men this is another one of those verses you need to memorize and let sink into your heart. We talked about the job of the husband and father last week. This passage in 2 Corinthians sums up pretty well how we should see our responsibilities. Guard your family as you stand firm in the faith, as you stand firm in the Lord. Be courageous and strong men for your family and your church.

Along with this encouragement to be strong and stand up comes the second encouragement; be wise and suit up.

2. Be wise and suit up.

Paul mentioned the armor of God back in verse 11 where he tells us to put it on so that we can stand up against Satan. Now he will elaborate on exactly what that armor of God entails. Paul doesn't come up with this imagery right out of thin air. First he is under house arrest which means there is either a Roman soldier chained to him or at least one posted at the door, which means he has been staring at a man in armor for days. Paul may also be drawing from a few OT passages in Isaiah. In Isaiah 11 there is a description of a branch that grows out of the stump of David. It's a description of Jesus. Go read the whole chapter it's a powerful picture but in Isaiah 11:5 it says, "He will wear righteousness like a belt and truth like an undergarment."

Later in Isaiah 59 God is being described as the one who brings justice, and Isaiah 59:17 describes him like this, "He put on righteousness as his body armor and placed the helmet of salvation on his head. He clothed himself with a robe of vengeance and wrapped himself in a cloak of divine passion."

Not only has Paul been visually seeing the armor on the soldier who is guarding him, but he has texts like these to draw from as well when he describes the armor of God in Ephesians 6:13-17, "Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

Church we need help. We need this armor. There are 3 things that tempt us. You might call them an unholy trinity of sin. There is the world around us, the culture. Then you have the flesh, our own evil and selfish desires. And lastly you have Satan and his demonic forces. We need help. We shouldn't be facing these things alone either. There are no gladiator Christians who make it, no lone rangers. We work together and we suit up together.

I'm not going to sugar coat things and tell you the battle is easy, it's not; but don't underestimate the power we have at our disposal because if God is for us who can be against us. Satan has already lost the war, but the battles we fight now are for the souls of men. What we do now really does echo for all eternity. Thank God he has given us his armor to help us in this battle.

There is a total of 6 pieces of armor. He starts with the belt of truth. Like a belt holds all their clothing together the truth holds our faith together. The belt was the foundation of the soldier's armor just like truth is the foundation of the Christian life. Jesus himself said that he was the truth.

Next was the breastplate of righteousness. That covered that most vulnerable places on your body. We have been made righteous through the blood of Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV) says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

There was a time when Satan accused us before God because of our sin, but in Revelation 12, where we see the red dragon of Christmas, it says this in verse 10, "Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: 'Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.'"

Satan can no longer accuse us before God because the blood of Christ makes us righteous. Satan has been hurled down to the earth, but later in Revelation 12 it says woe to the earth because the devil has gone down to you, and he is filled with fury because he knows his time is short. Essentially it says that Satan was enraged because the killing of Jesus on the cross didn't work like he thought. Now he has gone off to make war with us. That's why you put the breastplate of righteousness on every day.

To that Paul adds shoes of the gospel of peace. The soldier's footwear protected his feet in battle but also gave him traction while both marching and fighting. Our shoes being the gospel of peace give us the confidence to step onto the spiritual battlefield because we have the gospel, the good news, that brings peace. In the midst of the battle we have the peace of God that surpasses all understanding. Philippians 4 tells us that peace guards our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Next is the shield of faith. Paul probably has in mind the larger refrigerator door size shields that they would use to protect themselves from fiery arrows. He even describes Satan as shooting fiery arrows at us. The shield is a shield of faith. Faith is complete reliance on God. A total dependence on him and a willingness to do his will. Faith protects us.

Then we put on the helmet of salvation. Again the helmet was to protect a vulnerable place on the body. In 1 Thessalonians 5:8 Paul says, "But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation."

The helmet of salvation gives us confidence to step onto the battlefield rather than sitting on the sidelines keeping our salvation to ourselves and never sharing how we got it with anyone else. Satan's attacks and our own selfish desires often start in the mind, but with the helmet of salvation on we take every thought captive, we don't doubt God and his grace like Satan would want us to.

Lastly Paul tells us to grab the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. Obviously the sword was a key component to a soldier's armor. With the sword he fought his enemy, and we do the same with the word of God. Jesus sets that example for us when he was tempted by Satan, he quoted scripture to fight back against him. Hebrews 4:12 describes how powerful this weapon is where it says, "For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires."

That is the full armor of God. This is what we need to battle fearlessly. We should never step onto the spiritual battlefield alone, and we should never step onto the spiritual battlefield without the armor of God. We must be wise and suit up.

Although the description of the armor is finished with the sword. Paul seems to add a 7th weapon if you will. It's clear that we need to be strong and stand up. As we stand up we need to be wise and suit up with the armor of God. But there is one more aspect, one more weapon of choice when it comes to the spiritual battles we face, prayer. Paul tells us finally to be ready and pray up.

3. Be ready and pray up.

As you step onto the battlefield are you prayed up. Have you spent time in prayer about the battle you are facing. Have you spent time in communication with God so that when the battle changes, when the dragon changes his tactics, and he will, have you spent time with the Father enough to know his will and to be able to follow it in the midst of tough times, in the midst of temptation, and perhaps even in the midst of persecution. We have to be prayed up church.

Here's what Paul says in Ephesians 6:18-20, "Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere. And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words so I can boldly explain God's mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike. I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God's ambassador. So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for him, as I should."

To pray in the Spirit means to let the Spirit help you when you pray. Romans 8:26-27 say, "And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will."

Man, that is comforting to know; that when I don't know what to say or when I misspeak the Spirit is there to clean things up. Not just clean things up but plead for us in harmony with the will of God. That is so reassuring. Paul tells us to pray at all times and on every occasion. 1 Thessalonians 5 tells us to pray without ceasing. Satan will sometimes attack when we least expect it. That's why we need to be prayed up, that's why we need to be alert and ready with prayer ahead of time.

Any military strategist will tell you that when you are engaged in a battle, having air superiority, having air support, gives you the upper hand every time. Prayer is our air support. If you find yourself suddenly on the spiritual battlefield, but you've spent a consistent time with God in prayer, you've got the air superiority.

Not only is Paul telling them to be ready and prayed up, but he asked them to pray specifically for him. Not for his chains to be removed, not for God to take away the upcoming battle that he will have with Rome, but to pray and ask God to give him the right words so that he might boldly proclaim the gospel. The NLT uses the word boldly but the NIV says it like this in Ephesians 6:19-20, "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should."

I like that word fearlessly. We can't ignore that there is a spiritual battling waging in the unseen realm. Although Satan is powerful, and he is after us, and he uses the world to influence us, and we struggle all by ourselves with the flesh, we can be strong and stand up, because God has given us the wisdom to suit up with his armor, and the ability to be prayed up and ready for battle. Church this is our manual for spiritual warfare. We have to stop living like this battle doesn't exist. We can't live apathetic to its influence in our lives and in our culture.

We got to pray for each other. We have to pray for our missionaries. We got to call in the air support. We need to increase our odds of winning by listening to what Paul has said throughout this book. Like it or not the battle is here. Will you battle fearlessly alongside your brother and sister in Christ? Will you battle fearlessly for your family? Will you battle fearlessly for your spouse? Will you battle fearlessly for you kids and grandkids? Will you battle fearlessly for the souls of the lost? Will your heart break for them or will you just say oh by the grace of God at least it's not me. At least I'm saved, and take your spot on the sidelines never really engaging in the spiritual battle for the souls of the men and women and children who are lost and headed to hell.

It's a battlefield church, and we got all the armor, and all the weapons, and all the support we need to win. You have to decide, are you going to battle fearlessly for Him.