

MBC - 4/8/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson
Spiritual Warfare - Pt.5
"Behind Enemy Lines"
Ephesians 6:18

This morning is more like sharing my own devotional times with the Lord . . . I get to do that because you are my family! I pray that it blesses you the way it blessed me this week.

I misspoke 3 weeks ago when I said we were wrapping up this section in Ephesians on our spiritual warfare. I meant our spiritual armor, but even that was misleading because the most important weapon we have in our arsenal for defense and offense is in v.18. Let's read the whole passage to get the flow—

- Ephesians 6:10-20 ¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

I. Prayer and spiritual warfare.

John Bunyan had a dream - almost 400 years ago - about a man named Christian, trying to make his way to the Celestial City—

I saw then in my Dream, as far as this Valley reached, there was on the right hand a very deep Ditch. That is the Ditch into which the blind have led the blind in all ages, and have both miserably perished there. Again, behold on the left hand, there was a very dangerous quagmire, into which, if even a good man falls, he can find no bottom for his foot to stand on. Into that quagmire King David once fell, and would have no doubt been smothered in it, if he had not someone able to pluck him out.

The path-way here was also exceedingly narrow, and therefore good Christian was the more pushed; for when he sought in the dark to shun the ditch on the one hand, he was ready to tip over into the mire on the other; also when he sought to escape the mire, without great carefulness he would be ready to fall into the ditch.

Thus he went on, and I heard him here sigh bitterly; for, besides the dangers mentioned above, the path-way here was so dark, so that often, when he lifted up his foot to go forward, he knew not where, or on what he should set it next.

Poor man! where are you now? Your Day is Night.
Good man be not cast down, you yet are right:
Your way to Heaven lies by the gates of Hell;
Cheer up, hold out, with you it shall go well.

About the middle of this Valley, I saw the mouth of Hell, and as well it stood near the wayside.

“Now,” thought Christian, “what shall I do?”

And all the time the flame and smoke would come out in such abundance, with sparks and hideous noises (things that Christian's Sword made no impression on, as it did before with Apollyon) so that he was forced to put up his Sword, and make use of another weapon, called *All-prayer*.

So he cried in my hearing, “*O Lord I plead with you to deliver my Soul.*”

My brothers and sisters, crying out to the Lord God in the middle of trials and temptations is doing spiritual warfare. When you and I are face to face with the forces of hell, prayer isn't preparation for the battle, prayer *is* the battle. Are you in the middle of spiritual war, right now? Some temptation, or discouragement, or stress - you don't know where it's coming from - but it's pulling you away from your walk with Christ. Let me ask, are you pleading with God “*to deliver your soul?*”

If you aren't praying, you aren't fighting. If you aren't praying, you won't stand against the schemes of the devil. This is a one point sermon this morning, and here it is: *prayer is doing spiritual warfare*. When Paul comes to v.18, prayer isn't just another piece of the armor in this battle. Prayer is the battle. It's won or lost on your knees.

If you think about Paul's metaphor of putting on the armor of God, it isn't just some mechanical, theological exercise you go over in your mind, it's an expression of your personal dependence on your Heavenly Father - i.e., every piece of your spiritual armor only goes on with prayer –

- “God, it would be so easy to lie right now and get out of this - help me, Father, to keep on my belt of truth.”
- “God, I'm really tempted to sin, but deliver me from evil. I need the breastplate of righteousness - Your strength to keep me pure.”
- “God the enemy is all over me about my sins, he tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within - fix the helmet of the hope of salvation on my head.”
- “Father, I'm struggling with doubts, they're like fiery darts coming at me - fix Your Word in my mind so that my faith quenches every doubt! Oh no, . . . here comes another one . . . *shield!*”

Prayer should be the air that we breathe as we get out of bed every morning when we realize what we're up against - *who* we're up against. Paul commanded believers in 1 Thessalonians to “*pray without ceasing.*” Think about that: We should be in constant conversation with our Father: praising Him, thanking Him, asking Him for help, strength, wisdom. But there is an even more urgent reason that we *must* pray without ceasing:

- 1 Peter 5:8 . . . Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

The devil wants to eat you! Reason enough to keep in constant contact with our Commander-in-Chief.

- Are you ever out and about and realize that you don't have your cell phone? Adrenalin was just released all over this room! Don't you start to panic? - "Oh no, what if someone's trying to reach me? I'm missing texts - people will wonder why I'm not responding. What if I need help? I can't be out of communication!" Admit it - you feel naked.

That's the way we should feel when we are out and about and realize that we haven't checked into Heaven's Headquarters in awhile - we haven't prayed. We *should* feel naked, because we have left ourselves exposed to the Enemy.

Hands down, the best thing I've ever read on the connection between prayer and spiritual warfare is in John Piper's must read book on missions, "*Let the Nations Be Glad:*"

"We cannot know what prayer is for until we know that life is war. Life is war. That's not all it is. But it is certainly that. Our weakness in prayer is owing largely to our neglect of this truth. Prayer is primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief. It is not surprising that prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den. God has given prayer as a wartime walkie-talkie so that we can call headquarters for everything we need as the kingdom of Christ advances in the world."

I want to look at two OT saints this morning, and how prayer, or lack of prayer, affected their spiritual warfare. First we will look at Joshua, and then, Daniel.

Joshua

I'm reading through Joshua. He had the responsibility of leading the nation of Israel into enemy territory, destroying the enemy, and taking over their cities, homes, farms, everything. Massive responsibility, and Joshua knew that he would only succeed if he clung to the sword of the Spirit—

- Joshua 1:8 ⁸This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

And he also knew that he had to be constantly in prayer, every step of the way. Twice in this book, he blew it, and *both* times were because he didn't pray. When Joshua took Jericho - you remember, walking around the city, blowing trumpets? - Strange way to wage war, but they were following orders. In that battle, God commanded that they were not to take any plunder from the city. Joshua didn't know that a man named Achan disobeyed this order, took some treasure from Jericho, and had it hidden in his tent.

The next battle was the little town of Ai - piece of cake. Joshua was so confident after Jericho that he only sent 3,000 men. Everyone else stayed home. But lo and behold, the soldiers of Ai killed 36 men of Israel and sent the rest running. Joshua couldn't believe it! His faith was crushed because God had promised to give them victory, what happened?—

- Joshua 7:6-9 ⁶Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. (They are praying!) And they put dust on their heads. ⁷And Joshua said, "Alas, O Lord GOD, why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan! ⁸O Lord, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies! ⁹For the

Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it and will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will you do for your great name?"

Joshua is sincere, he is crying out to God in prayer, but God's response is surprising—

- Joshua 7:10-12 ¹⁰The LORD said to Joshua, "Get up! Why have you fallen on your face? ¹¹Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings. ¹²Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. . .

This is fascinating: What is God saying to Joshua? "Oh, *now* you pray? You should have been praying to Me all along, seeking My face. If you had been in prayer, I would have revealed this sin in the camp and kept you from sending good men out to die in battle."

Really? Joshua should have known that? Yes. He got cocky after Jericho and turned off his walkie-talkie and stopped talking to Headquarters. This story is very sobering: It's saying to us that we should always be in contact with our Father, laying our lives out before Him, and asking Him if we're missing anything. "Lord, do I have any blindspots? Something I'm not seeing?" We should always be praying what David prayed—

- Psalm 139:23-24 ²³Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

*I remember reading this passage years ago and I saw how one person's hidden sin affected all of God's people. So I prayed, "Father, please, show me if I have any logs in my own eye, and show us if there is any sin in the camp here at MBC." And God answered! Boy did He answer. It was hard to have sinned exposed, but I can only wonder how much harder it might have been if it had gone on! What kind of opportunity would that have given the devil?

- Beloved, I believe God will always be faithful to answer our heartfelt prayers to reveal sin, and then to deal mercifully. And from what we read here - God expects us to pray this way.

Back to Joshua: I believe that if Joshua had prayed like this, there wouldn't have been 36 widows in Israel. But God had to stop Joshua and the people in their tracks and remind them to obey Him completely - and to pray without ceasing.

And he ceased to pray another time. We read about it in ch.9 - the story of the Gibeonites. God had made it clear that Joshua wasn't to make any peace treaties with any of the peoples of the land. Well the people of Gibeon heard what happened to Jericho and Ai, and they realized they were next. So they came up with a really ingenious plan: they sent some people to Joshua at Gilgal wearing worn out clothes, and old, dried up provisions, and they pretended to have come from far away to plead with Joshua to make a covenant with them, not to destroy them—

- They even told Joshua that they had heard about how God had destroyed Israel's enemies - under Moses back on the other side of the Jordan! - not the recent victories in Jericho and Ai, because that would have given away the fact that they lived close by. They had really thought this deception through!

You can't blame them for wanting to survive! And besides that, they brought provisions to give to Joshua and his people. But this is what we read—

- Joshua 9:14-15 ¹⁴So the men took some of their provisions, *but did not ask counsel from the LORD*. ¹⁵And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them.

They didn't pray about this. They should have immediately gone to prayer and asked God for wisdom when the Gibeonites showed up at their door. But isn't this the way it goes: We get excited about some idea, some project, some event, and we make our plans. And then we remember: "Oh, and God, bless our plans!" It's like an afterthought - we sprinkle prayer on top of what we've already decided we want to do. What we should do is pray before, during, and after our planning!

Well this almost ended in disaster when the people found out that the Gibeonites were really their neighbors, and Joshua and the leaders had made a covenant with them - what God specifically said they were not to do. And it says, "*Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders.*" They had a right to! Spiritual leaders should be people of prayer. If they had been, this wouldn't have happened.

*Let me say for the record: Please, hold me and the other leaders at MBC accountable to be in the Word, and constant in prayer! You can ask us if we are. And pray that we would be! The stakes are too high for us to ever let down our guard. What does Paul say about praying in this battle? "*Keep alert with all perseverance!*"

- Now there is a lesson here about prayer and spiritual warfare that is so, so important, and I don't want you to miss it: We must, must, keep praying, whether we *think* we are in the thick of battle, or we *think* we're resting up between battles. In both of these examples in Joshua, the people weren't experiencing some crisis or battle which would lead them to cry out to God in prayer. In the first example, they had just come off an amazing victory at Jericho! They are having celebration parties! In the second example, they just had a caravan of friendly visitors show up, bearing goodies! Why pray? Well God expected them to pray, always. If they had, they wouldn't have been defeated at Ai, or deceived by the Gibeonites.

Wow. I have to ask myself: So would I still be praying, in those two situations? Asking God to show me if I'm missing something? If all my armor is in place? I'm definitely praying when I recognize I am in a spiritual battle. I don't forget to pray when I see the enemy coming straight at me. But I don't always pray when the enemy is coming at me - and I don't see it, or recognize it! So when am I the most vulnerable to attack?

- If you are going through it right now, wrestling with the devil - pray! But if you think you are in spiritual lull, catching some R&R - you *really* need to pray!

Because your enemy isn't resting. You are always at war. So you must always be praying.

And let me give you another reason to pray: this is the way we can have sweet fellowship with our Father, right in the middle of the battle, right when we need it most. Let me throw in one more OT saint, David:

In Psalm 23, that comforting Psalm that we read yesterday at Doug Carter's memorial service - about God as our beloved Shepherd, staying right with us, even through the Valley of the shadow of death, David completely switches metaphors and says this - it's pretty amazing—

- Psalm 23:5 ⁵You prepare a table before me *in the presence of my enemies*; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

We go from sheep in a pasture to soldiers at war, and as the battle is raging, when we cry out to God, it's like He sends the USO: He holds off the enemy while He spreads out a feast for us - like often happens to our troops at Thanksgiving or Christmas - right on the battlefield! Prayer takes us there.

David wrote about this again a few chapters later. In Ps.27, his enemies are on him: "Evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh." But David just wants to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, and to meditate in His temple. So it's right in the middle of this spiritual warfare that he experiences this, because he is praying—

- Psalm 27:5-6 ⁵For he will hide me in his shelter *in the day of trouble*; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock. ⁶And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

Daniel.

I want to show you an example of the impact of our prayers on the invisible spiritual warfare we are engaged in. Turn with me back to Daniel 10. In Daniel 10, he receives a word from the Lord (v. 1)

- Daniel 10:1 ¹In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a word was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar. And the word was true, and it was a great conflict. And he understood the word and had understanding of the vision.

Daniel was stunned by this revelation, and notice his response—

- Daniel 10:2-3 ²In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. ³I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks.

What he was doing was praying with tears and fasting to understand this revelation - and keep in mind how long he prayed: 3 weeks = 21 days.

After these three weeks he went out to the banks of the Tigris River and had a vision that was so awesome he could hardly bear it. Then in v. 10, the man - or angelic being - in this vision reaches out and touches Daniel and leaves him trembling on his hands and knees! Then look at—

- Daniel 10:11-12 ¹¹And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly loved (that must have been encouraging!), understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. ¹²Then he said to me, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and *I have come because of your words*."

Now mark this: This angelic being came in response to Daniel's words = Daniel's 3 weeks of fervent prayer. God sent this being in response to Daniel's prayers - and not at the end of the

3 weeks, but at the very beginning. God heard Daniel and answered his prayers! And the three-week delay was not because it took God three weeks to hear. What was it then? Now this is amazing—

- Daniel 10:13-14 ¹³The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, ¹⁴and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come.”

The reason the messenger of God was detained is because an evil spiritual being called “the prince of the kingdom of Persia” stood against him. And the reason this angelic messenger got free from this opposition was because the holy angel, Michael, came to help him.

* A few weeks ago I said that some people believe that there are “territorial spirits” that have demonic control over geographic regions. Well apparently, there is truth to that - although we aren’t told to try and bind them or talk to them or any of that jazz. But apparently at this time, there was a supernatural being, opposed to God, over Persia (modern day Iran - maybe he’s still ruling Iran!) And we would presume that his job was to keep the people of Persia in spiritual darkness. And this isn’t the only angel mentioned. Look at verse 20-21:

- “Then he [the messenger from God] said, ‘Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece (another demon) will come. But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince.’”

So it appears that there was a spirit over Persia and a spirit over Greece. But at the end of verse 21 it says: “Michael, *your* prince.” The “*your*” is plural. Michael wasn’t Daniel’s guardian angel, he was the holy angel assigned to Israel.

Now I want you to see what we glean from this about spiritual warfare and the importance of prayer—

1.) First of all, do you remember we said a couple weeks ago: “*What is visible and physical is being controlled by the spiritual and invisible.*” We see that right here! Don’t slip into a secular worldview that says this world can be explained in only naturalistic, or political, or economic terms. Not true! Weird spiritual stuff is going on that we don’t have a clue about. We read it here, and especially in the book of Job, and beloved, nothing has changed in that regard from the time of Job or Daniel. This should keep us humble and on our knees.

2.) I want you to notice this: Daniel was given a very rare, unique glimpse behind the curtain to learn a little about the angelic warfare that was going on all around him. Very few people in Scripture received this revelation. But, he didn’t know anything about this when he started praying - he was on his knees crying out to *God* for those three weeks. And even when he learned about the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece, and Michael the archangel - it never says that he started addressing angels and demons, trying to bind the territorial spirits or anything like that. He was always focused on God - crying out to God. And we should be too!

And here is the coolest thing in this passage:

3.) It’s no coincidence that the messenger to Daniel said that his struggle with the prince of Persia lasted exactly the same amount of time that Daniel’s fasting and praying did – twenty-

one days. Get this: It was Daniel's prayers, on earth, that turned the tables in this angelic struggle in the heavenlies. Look at it again—

- Daniel 10:12-14 ¹²Then he said to me, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and *I have come because of your words.* (i.e., because of your prayers!) ¹³The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, ¹⁴and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days. . ."

The way I read this, Michael came and helped this messenger so he could deliver his message to Daniel - *in response to Daniel's prayers! That warfare in the spiritual realm was being fought by Daniel in the prayer realm.* And Daniel didn't have a clue!

Daniel wasn't praying about angels and demons, but his prayers had a result in that invisible, supernatural arena. And so do yours and mine. Now I think that we should wrestle in prayer for the things that we know are God's will in our lives and our families and our church and our city and our world. And by and large we should leave it to God how our prayers affect the spiritual warfare around us. But I want you to know this morning that your prayers go way beyond what you can see and hear and touch - your prayers do stuff in the spiritual places. Stuff you might not even know about until you get to the other side. But remember this: prayer is not preparation for the battle - prayer is the battle.

And let me show you another passage that refers to how our prayers on earth affect things in the heavens. Just listen to this scene that John taking place in heaven—

- Revelation 8:3 ³And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer *with the prayers of all the saints* on the golden altar before the throne.

And in response to the prayers of His people on earth, God sends judgment on His enemies who persecute His people on earth.

Oh we should pray! The prayers of God's people are like the fragrant incense from His altar. When we pray on earth, He hears in heaven and He acts. And if we don't see results on earth, it could be that He is doing amazing things in the heavens in this battle that we are fighting.

Because you are praying, God could be stopping demons from attacking; sending out holy angels to protect you; changing circumstances and changing hearts - doing *beyond* all that you could ask or even think! Prayer can go behind enemy lines. And prayer accesses the infinite power of God on your behalf.

And let me leave you with this amazing thought: One day Jesus' disciples were asked to cast the demon out of a poor little demon possessed boy. This demon that had taken away his ability to talk, it would cause him to foam at the mouth - it was trying to kill him. The disciples tried everything they knew. Finally Jesus came and cast out the demon, and we read this—

- Mark 9:28-29 ²⁸And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁹And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."

Two things we know for sure: They *didn't* pray - or they stopped praying too soon. And if they *had*, they *could* have cast out this demon.

You will probably never face spiritual warfare this intense, but whatever spiritual beings might be attacking you, tormenting you, tempting you - doing all that is in their power to destroy your faith - you have the ultimate weapon to shut them down: You can go to the Commander-in-Chief, in the name of Jesus Christ. You can pray. And Charles Spurgeon said this—

“When you plead the name of Christ, you plead that which shakes the gates of hell and that which the hosts of heaven obey, and God Himself feels the sacred power of that divine plea.”

The Servant in Battle - from *The Valley of Vision*

O Lord,
I bless thee that the issue of the battle between thyself and Satan
 has never been uncertain,
 and will end in victory.
Calvary broke the dragon's head,
 and I contend with a vanquished foe,
 who with all his subtlety and strength
 has already been overcome.
When I feel the serpent at my heel
 may I remember him whose heel was bruised,
 but who, when bruised, broke the devil's head.
My soul with inward joy extols the mighty conqueror.
Heal me of any wounds received in the great conflict;
 if I have gathered defilement,
 if my faith has suffered damage,
 if my hope is less than bright,
 if my love is not fervent,
 if some creature-comfort occupies my heart,
 if my soul sinks under the pressure of the fight.
O thou whose every promise is balm,
 every touch life,
 draw near to thy weary warrior,
 refresh me, that I may rise again to wage the strife,
 and never tire until my enemy is trodden down.
Give me such fellowship with thee that I may defy Satan,
 unbelief, the flesh, the world,
 with delight that comes not from a creature,
 and which a creature cannot mar.
Give me a draught of the eternal fountain
 that lieth in thy immutable, everlasting love and decree.
Then shall my hand never weaken,
 my feet never stumble,
 my sword never rest,
 my shield never rust,
 my helmet never shatter,
 my breastplate never fall,
As my strength rests in the power of thy might. Amen.