

Fighting a Battle Already Won

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. Let me add my welcome. My name is Archie. I'm one of the ministry trainees here at Brunfield. And like Graham said, let me encourage you to have your Bibles open in Ephesians.

If you're not already there, let me pray as you do turn there. Heavenly Father, would the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you this morning. Amen. Imagine with me. It's February 1945. World War II. You're crouched down low. The floor underneath you is a cold, hard, unforgiving metal.

Your hands are freezing numb as they grip your rifle. Your socks are soaking wet in your boots. You can't help but think the war is supposed to be over. D-Day was months ago.

But here you are. Your stomach is still turning. That familiar, horrible mixture of anxiety and the motion sickness from the boat that rocks steadily in the waves underneath you.

[1 : 18] The air around you is pregnant with an expectant silence. And you look around the boat and you see the faces of your friends. That is your friends that are still alive.

And then the boat hits the sand. The landing ramp is lowered and you know that you have got to keep fighting. In a similar sort of way, in the Christian life, Jesus has already won the victory against sin and against death.

But make no mistake, we too are nonetheless still at war. See, it was more than 300 days after D-Day before the war actually ceased.

And for us, a little bit like in World War II, victory has really already been won. And yet the battle rages. And you know, we have a God who one day is going to come back and wrap the whole thing up.

But in the meantime, we fight. And we fight on the winning side. In today's passage, Paul does not pull any punches.

[2 : 32] He says to the Ephesian church, you have a relentless enemy. A spiritual enemy. We see that in verses 10 to 12. A spiritual enemy.

But they also have a God who has provided everything that they need to stand firm in this battle. He's given them spiritual armor to protect them.

In verses 13 to 17. Spiritual armor. And he's given them spiritual weapons with which to fight back. In verses 18 to 20.

Spiritual weapons. So that's where we're going this morning. But where have we been in this letter? Why not come back to chapter 1 with me? Chapter 1, verse 20.

What is Christ doing there? He is seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly realms. Now that is totally mind-blowing in and of itself.

[3 : 32] This is Jesus who came to earth as a man, died in our place and rose again. And he's now seated at the right hand of God. And he rules there from his throne.

But it gets even more mind-blowing. Come to chapter 2 with me. Verse 6 of chapter 2 says this. God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

Get this. This is what it means to be in Christ. This is the identity of the Christian sitting with the ruling Christ in heaven. Sitting.

But then in chapter 4, we get a change of posture. Eight times the Ephesians are told to walk in the middle section of this letter.

Sometimes our translation masks this a bit. But if you come to verse 1 of chapter 4 with me, you will see what I mean. Verse 1 of chapter 4. In the NIV, it says, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

[4 : 39] And maybe a closer translation might be, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of your calling. Paul says, You have been raised up to sit with Christ.

That is your identity. Now live like it. Walk the walk. I don't know about you, but as we've gone through these walk passages in the last few weeks as a church, I have been really challenged. Because walking this walk is just so obviously not easy. And in today's passage, Paul acknowledges that. He gets really honest.

He gets very real with the Ephesian church. He says it's hard to walk the walk because there is a spiritual enemy trying to bring them to their knees.

Did you notice in our passage today, Paul's encouragement to the Ephesian church to stand? Back in chapter 6, have a look at verse 11 of our passage.

[5 : 42] Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand. And then in verse 13, halfway through verse 13, that you may be able to stand your ground.

And after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then. Paul is clear. They are going to need help just to stay on their feet.

And though the victory has already been won, if they're going to keep walking as those who sit with Christ, they are going to have to fight to stay standing.

So we've got to ask that question. And this is really our first point. Who is this spiritual enemy that is trying to bring the Ephesian church to their knees?

In the last 100 years or so, the predominant worldview in this country, in the West, has been one that denies spirituality altogether. It's the view that if we can't interact materially with something, then it simply doesn't exist.

[6 : 44] If we can't measure it, then it must be made up. If I'm really honest, that is the non-Christian worldview that I find most tempting.

I guess I really want to think that we're in control. And you too maybe might be tempted to think that this spiritual warfare stuff is a load of nonsense, that it doesn't exist.

But the first step to taking a stand against any enemy is acknowledging that that enemy is really there, and then really understanding what that enemy is doing.

Maybe you take the opposite view. There are those who think that this material worldview is fading in favor of a sort of 21st century mystical spiritualism.

You know, people who seek to explain everything we can't understand by describing it as spiritual or even demonic. And actually, that's probably quite a lot closer to the Ephesian experience.

[7 : 51] See, in the ancient world, a spiritual understanding of the world around them was a pretty normal way to think. But that spiritualization of the things that we can't explain is not what our passage is talking about either.

So what does our passage say? Did you notice at the end of verse 11? Have a look at the end of verse 11 with me again.

Whose schemes are we talking about here? It is the devil's schemes. See, the devil is a very real spiritual being who exists in total rebellion against God.

He's not equal to God and he has been defeated. But he nonetheless seeks to turn hearts away from their creator.

He's not a pointless evil. He has a goal in all of this to influence hearts away from God. Have a look at verse 12 with me.

[8 : 57] For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

This verse is not talking about an inherent evil in authority. It's not talking about overreaching government or police states or even lockdowns.

Instead, this verse is a glimpse into the spiritual tools that the devil has at his disposal in his heart-turning mission. That's his goal, to turn hearts away from God.

And so for us, I think it's important that we look in the mirror before we look out of the window. Because he exercises that influence in my heart.

And he exercises that influence in your heart too. And how does he do that? I think the Bible gives us two primary ways that the devil influences hearts.

[10 : 00] Firstly, he tempts us to sin. He asks us, did God really say? Just like he did with Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter 3, he causes us to doubt God's word and the consequences of sin.

And then he says that sin will be good for us, that we will enjoy it, that we deserve it. He tempts us to sin. And secondly, he then accuses us in our sin.

He tells us that despite what Jesus has done, because of our sin, we are utterly condemned. He tempts us and he accuses us.

But our passage says we have got to stand against those lies. And our passage tells us that God has provided protection for us as we do that.

Spiritual armor. Before we get into the armor, have a look back at verse 10 with me, because there's something really key here. It says, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

[11:04] If our enemy is a spiritual one, superhuman if you like, then on our own, we are utterly powerless against his schemes. Powerless on our own, but protected by God.

This armor is God's power. It is his provision. It is his protection. So come with me as we explore the first piece of armor in verse 14.

Verse 14, the belt of truth buckled around your waist. Now, the spiritual purpose of each piece of armor is given to us in their description.

Did you notice that? It says here, it's the belt of truth. Truth is the important thing, not that it is a belt. So what is truth? What is truth?

Well, truth is an absolutely accurate description of reality. It is what really is. Truth is all about fact rather than opinion.

[12:11] And in chapter one, Paul told the Ephesians that they were included in Christ when they heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. So Paul is saying that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the ultimate truth of the universe, of reality.

That is the truth that sin is rebellion against God. The truth that its consequences are eternal death. Death. And the truth that God's plan to bring his people into a relationship with him is in Christ. And if the Ephesians are going to have any hope of standing firm against the devil's schemes, they are going to have to stand firm in this truth.

I think truth as a concept is becoming increasingly tricky. Maybe you've noticed that too. Phrases like, my truth, or that might be true for you, are just so normal these days.

And to be honest, when people say things like that, I think they're really talking about opinion, not truth, not really, because that's not how truth works, is it? If two things contradict each other, even if it's in quite a small way, they can't both be true.

[13:31] If I say that Wales beat Scotland in the rugby last weekend, and you say that Scotland beat Wales, those statements can't both be true. Nor could we both be true if we came up with different scorelines for the game.

And so for us in church life, we have got to be aware that this is how truth works. As we study God's word together, we can't allow this my truth tendency to creep into what we're doing.

Instead, we've got to work hard to discover together what the biblical author, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was contributing to this gospel of truth. What is the author, what is the Holy Spirit saying about human rebellion?

What are they saying about God's rescue mission in Christ? We've got to discover that truth. This is our first protection against the devil's lies, the belt of truth.

Next, we have the breastplate of righteousness. Righteousness is a legal term. It means to be utterly innocent.

[14:44] And I think there are two sorts of righteousness in view here. First and foremost, the Ephesians can stand utterly baneless before the God of this universe, not because this breastplate enables them to live a perfectly righteous life, but instead because Jesus, the truly righteous one, the one who really did live a righteous life, has died in their place.

And so it's his righteousness that they wear. It's a given righteousness. But not only are they given this identity of righteousness, but Christ also does give them the ability to live increasingly righteous lives in him.

The ability to start walking the walk. Not walking into a righteous identity, but walking out of an identity already won by Christ.

I mentioned at the start that one of the ways that the devil targets us is by accusation. And he does that because the reality is, even with the breastplate of righteousness, we all fail to walk the walk consistently, don't we?

And what the devil does is that he accuses us, he persuades us that we aren't really saved. That our sin is too bad or too secret or too ongoing to possibly be covered by the cross.

[16:14] Sometimes he causes us to accuse ourselves like that, turning our own thoughts against us. Sometimes he uses others to accuse us, well-meaning friends focusing in on one sin or another and condemning us for it.

Sometimes he uses our circumstances to accuse us. Persuading us that whatever is going on in life, the cards that fate has dealt us, wouldn't possibly be so bad if it wasn't for our sin.

And sometimes the opposite is true and isn't this tricky. He persuades us that we are righteous enough on our own. The devil loves to accuse us.

And so by faith, we've got to put on this breastplate, which is the righteousness of Christ, his righteousness, because that is what it takes to make us acceptable to God.

The breastplate of righteousness. Next, have a look at verse 15 with me. Verse 15, feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

[17:25] Paul says the right footwear is really important. Take yourself back to World War II and imagine that instead of those sturdy, if slightly damp combat boots, you're wearing a pair of high heels.

Or as my wife Katie put it the other day, as we looked at this passage together, you wouldn't want to climb Everest in flip-flops. They're silly examples, but Paul is saying that in the spiritual battles of Christian life, our spiritual shoes are essential as we stand.

Did you notice in verse 15? Why? You notice what this spiritual footwear is for. It says there, the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

The gospel of peace. Peace between us and God. And as a result, peace between us on earth. We heard last week from Graham about the various relationships in the Ephesian church.

The variety of age and gender and socioeconomic status. Paul says that the gospel that has brought you peace with God also brings you peace with one another.

[18:44] And not only that, but you must be willing and ready to share that gospel peace with those who don't yet know it. For us here at Brunfield, we also live in a multicultural city, don't we?

And in many ways, our church here beautifully illustrates that. But it is a sad truth that we still tend to gravitate towards people who are just like us.

And it's because the devil does not want us to be gospel people who live in peace with God and therefore with each other. And he does not want the gospel of peace to be proclaimed.

But we can be willing to extend this gospel of peace to unlikely people. To those who don't look like us.

Who don't talk like us. Who don't think like us. You know, it really is my experience that putting on this footwear and stepping over the pain line to share the gospel with unlikely people.

[19:49] Can just be so encouraging. Because I think God uses our willingness to step out for him like that. To defend us against the accusation that the gospel of peace is powerless.

Feet fitted with the readiness of the gospel of peace. Next, have a look at verse 16 with me. Take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Faith. Not a willful attempt to convince themselves of things for which they have no evidence. But the gift from God that unites them to Christ.

By which, as we've seen, they are seated in the heavenlies with him. By which, as they grow, they walk into who they have been made to be. This is what the Ephesian church needs.

Faith. But what are these fiery arrows that the shield of faith is protecting against? I think, certainly, the devil's schemes in general.

[21:04] But I think, maybe more specifically, the fears and doubts that attack faith. The things that undermine the Ephesians' identity in Christ.

I think what Paul is saying is that those niggling fears and doubts are a little bit like the sting of pain caused by an arrow. But remember that these are fiery arrows.

And it does not take long before fears and doubts burst into flame. What feel like small fears and doubts in this life, if they are not dealt with, with the gift of faith, can so quickly become a much bigger problem.

You know the feeling, I'm sure. When a friend asks a question about God and it completely stumps you. Or you see the horrific behavior of a group of people who call themselves Christians and it's just so discouraging.

Or as the devil accuses you in your sin and you begin to doubt the life-changing power of the gospel in your life. Friends, in those doubts and in those fears, we have the wonderful gift of faith.

[22 : 18] Faith that God in Christ is our personal Savior. Faith in his promises that he never fails. Faith in his providence that he is always in control.

That is the defensive power of the shield of faith. And Paul says, take up this gift. The final gift then is the helmet of salvation in verse 17.

Paul takes this image of the helmet directly out of Isaiah chapter 59, where the Lord wears the helmet of salvation as he wins the victory for his people.

See, salvation is what the Lord has done for us. The devil deceives us, causes us to doubt, to be discouraged and to fear.

And through all of that, the devil is attacking our assurance of salvation. The church in Ephesus desperately trying to walk against the tide of the culture around them.

[23 : 25] And the devil would be accusing them in their sin and telling them that what Jesus had done for them on the cross was not enough. But it's a lie. Friends, there is nothing that we can do or have done that can separate us from the love of Christ.

He has done everything necessary to restore us to God and to seat us with him in heaven. And this helmet is simply a wonderful reminder of that salvation that he has won for us.

And actually, all of this armor, the whole thing, it's a gift from God. It's about what he has done. In verse 11, it's his mighty power in which we are to be strong and to stand.

Before we move on, just note that to stand in this battle, no one piece of armor will do. Did you notice that in our passage in verse 11 and in verse 13, Paul says, put on the full armor.

If we're going to have any chance of standing at all, we're going to need all of it. But God does not stop with the armor. He gives us spiritual weapons with which to fight back against the devil's schemes.

[24 : 46] Two spiritual weapons, I think, were given from this passage. The first, have a look at the second half of verse 17 with me. The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

We cannot separate the Spirit and the word that the Spirit has inspired and continues to act through. And so as we read the Bible, God's word, as we share it with others, even now as it is preached, his Spirit is at work.

And he is a most effective weapon against the devil's schemes. One of the first things, as we've already seen, that the devil does in the story of the Bible is cause mankind to doubt God's word. Did God really say? That's the line that the devil used to sway Adam and Eve. And the same is true today. We don't use swords in warfare today, do we?

Because they're just nowhere near as effective as guns and bombs and whatever else the army use. And I think we've sort of done the same thing with God's word.

[25 : 57] We've believed the lie that it's no longer effective, that it's not relevant anymore, that we need something other than the Bible to help us really know the Lord and fight the devil.

But through his word, the Spirit is at work in us and in those that we share it with. And it is a most potent weapon against the schemes of the devil.

The second weapon, and it's linked to the Spirit. Do you see in verse 18? Have a look at verse 18 with me. Now, prayer isn't mentioned specifically as a weapon, but it seems to flow on here with the reference to the Spirit.

And I think there's just such an emphasis on prayer here. I think Paul wants the Ephesians to take up prayer as a spiritual weapon. Did you notice that emphasis?

He says, on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers for all the Lord's people. Paul says, just get praying all the time. Pray in all ways.

[27 : 19] Pray for all people. Pray. And three things, I think, that Paul says to get praying for. Pray for yourselves. You see that?

All kinds of prayers and requests. Friends, don't hesitate to ask God to act in your life, to aid you in this battle. Pray, too, for other Christians, for all the Lord's people, Paul says.

Pray for your friends at church. And even pray for those folks in the church down the road. They're in this battle, too. And finally, in verse 19, Paul asks them to pray for him.

Have a look at verse 19 with me. Pray for me also, that whenever I speak, words may be given me, so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.

And then at the end of verse 20, pray that I may declare it fearlessly as I should. He's asking them to pray for him and specifically to pray for him as he shares the good news with folks who don't know Jesus.

[28 : 29] And so we, too, can pray for those who don't know Jesus and for each other as we seek to share him with them. So pray for yourself.

Pray for other Christians and pray for a world that doesn't know Jesus. These are our spiritual weapons in this battle. This is how we will win back ground through the word of God and by prayer, both empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Now, a quick reminder before we finish from Paul that we don't do this alone. Have a look at verse 21 and 22 with me. I just think that's such a wonderful picture of how early Christianity functioned. As these guys traveled from place to place, sharing these letters and encouraging each other. Maybe when we're allowed to travel again, next time you go on holiday, even if you just head up to the highlands or down to the Lake District, why not find a local church there?

Allow yourself to be encouraged by the people there taking up this armor and standing against the devil's schemes. And why not encourage them, too? Share what's going on here at Brunnsfield.

[30 : 04] Pray for one another. We do not do this alone. Now, as we finish, let me take you back to the war.

Your hands are still painfully numb on your rifle. Your toes are swimming in your socks. And then that pregnant silence gives birth to officers' whistles and the whistles of artillery and then shouting and explosions and it's chaos.

You stand up and there are hundreds of little boats just like yours. Thousands of men running onto the beaches to fight. The enemy might have been defeated on D-Day, but they continued to fight brutal battles like this one for more than 300 days before the war was over.

Friends, Christ has won the victory. The outcome is sure. But be under no illusions. The enemy is still active.

And he wants to bring us to our knees. So take up what we've been given to survive the battle. Take up the gift of spiritual armor. Take up your spiritual weapons and fight, knowing that the victory is sure.

[31 : 26] Let me pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much that you have done everything to win the victory in this battle.

That we know that in Christ we fight on the winning side. Would you help us to take up this armor, to wear it daily?

Would you help us to, through your word and by your spirit and as we pray, win back ground against the devil's schemes in our lives and the lives of those around us?

Amen.