

The Call to War - The Battle-part 2

Eph 6:10-13

(10) Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

(11) Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

(12) For 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.

(13) Therefore 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.

Recap

Last week we started a series entitled “The Battle”

We started by looking at the general topic of spiritual warfare.

I reminded you that I did not believe that the job of the church was to bring direct social change, but direct spiritual change in the lives of individuals. These individuals as a result of a revelation of Christ would out of their passion for Christ and their compassion for people reach out and do good for God.

I stated that I did not believe that Christ came to garner social acceptance but to engage in the destruction of the kingdom of darkness and make manifest the Kingdom of God.

We looked at what spiritual warfare was not.

We talked about how modern Christians have lost sight of scriptural reality and started to embrace new age mystical practices all under the name of new revelation theology

We talked about how so naïve people have fallen into the place of blaming demons for what are works of the flesh.

And finally we talked about the fact that Spiritual warfare has been misrepresented as an offensive rather than a defensive campaign. We made special mention of this because I do not believe that we are engaged in attacking the enemy, Christ has already done that. Christ attacked the enemy. Christ waged war on Satan ... and won.

We, the church of Jesus Christ, His body and the earth are the occupying forces and we are defending ourselves against the insurgent attacks of a defeated foe - nothing more.

We are engaged in occupation, not invasion.
We are apart of the conquering army

We are not victims
We are not the oppressed

So many people live and pray like they are the victims of a great cosmic conspiracy, not a cosmic victory

The battle has already been won.
The enemy has been vanquished

We are the mop up troops.
We are the occupational forces.
We are here to expand the kingdom of God and return the spoils to the victor

The setting - Ephesus at the Time of Paul.

The verses that we read this morning come from Paul's letter written to the church in Ephesus and the churches in the surrounding areas.

The city of Ephesus controlled a large network of outlying villages and rural areas up to 30 miles from the city center.

The letter was probably designed to be read in the house churches of the region and through out the city.

Remember that some estimate that Timothy was the residing Bishop/pastor over this serves of churches that may have had as many as 30,000 people believes as apart of this church in Ephesus

Now...Ephesus was a large and important port city on the vest coast of Asia, one of the wonders of the ancient world.

Two great roads led out of Rome to Ephesus.

Right in the middle of this city was the Temple Diana.

Diana was the patron saint of prostitutes and her follows engaged in sexual practices with temple prostitutes in her honor.

Black magic and various witchcraft was practiced through out the city and the region.

Paul spent 3 years in this church helping their growth and development as Christians

The spread of Christianity through out the region was the cause for great unsettling.

It literally changed the nature and character of the economic, spiritual and tourist landscape of the entire region.

It affected the sale of temple idols.

It affected the growth of the magic cults.

People turned their back on previous religious practices; they brought their books on witchcraft and burnt them in a public ceremony.

The value of the books was valued at 50,000 pieces of silver

When Christians get to being Christ-followers and not Christian pagans – whole regions of a country will be changed in a matter of months.

Christianity spread to other cities from Ephesus,
Paul headquarters there
The church was flourishing
The church was very successful
Churches were planted out of there

Yet because of the growth of the church and the passion of the saints, people started to persecute them.

The content of this letter.

In AD 62, Paul writes to the Church in Ephesus from his prison cell in Rome.

There are three great themes in the letter to the Ephesians

The first is Christ reconciling all things to Himself.
Second is the great act of God reconciling all things to Himself and
Third how His church is called to live this faith out loud

Here is Paul writing to this great church on these great themes and he comes to the end of his letter.
Some of the richest Christian theology ever written!

He is wrapping up.
He is writing his parting words.

And there comes this incredible change of direction

And it is as if he is thinking, my friends are scared.

- They are facing false teachers,
- They are surrounded by witchcraft and false religion.
- Sin is surrounding them –it is an accepted part of their culture and lifestyle
- Incredibly powerful people are persecuting them.

Their enemies must have seemed so strong.

So over powering, so affluent,

It is like Paul is aware of their fear and the fact that fear immobilizes and turns people into victims.

Do you ever feel like that? Do you ever feel overwhelmed by the enemy around you? That they seem to have all the power, all the influence, and all the authority? Then Paul was writing to you too.

So he changes pace and direction in his parting comments and he starts to talk about the nature of the real conflict and reminds these people about what they are engaged in.

He declares:

Eph 6:10-11

(10) Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

(11) Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

What he was doing then is what I am attempting to do now.

He was trying to alert them to the fact that there was nothing more urgent and important than for them to realize that the thing they were engaged in was a battle of a spiritual nature, not a fleshly nature.

The world today ridicules such a statement as does much of the church world.

People today don't see the spiritual realm as a reality. They see it as an object of fiction.

They see Satan as something that can be controlled or even negotiated with.

In all reality the majority of people have no faith in God or Christ and are dismissive at best over the devil and his minions.

But to those of us, like the Church at Ephesus these statements of Paul are full of significance and meaning.

To understand and comprehend the fact that we are spiritual beings engaged in spiritual issues is vitally important to our entire spiritual walk.

Paul is saying here to these people in Ephesus- these people facing seemingly over whelming odds - ---

Don't let you fears overwhelm you.

There is a battle going on, the battle is spiritual and that battle is with the devil, not others in the community. The victory is God's!

He was trying to alert them to the true nature of the battle

So often when we are flourishing,
When we are prospering,
We forget we are engaged in a spiritual activity.

When we have money.
When we have influence
When the government is for us
When people are for us
When we have favor

The churches forgets what her mandate is
She comes to see her duty as one of social justice instead primarily
the redemption of souls.

Am I saying that the church should not be involved in social justice issues?

No! I am just saying that there is nothing more important than a life reconciled and growing in Christ.

So here is Paul in this environment and he is reminding these people that the Main Thing is still the Main Thing.

So lets look at what Paul is saying here.

Lets have a look at his opening statements

The first thing we notice is that Paul reminds the Church at Ephesus – and it is a great place for us to start - that there is a battle and it is a spiritual battle, not a physical battle.

It may manifest in the physical realm,
but it has its roots and origins in the spiritual realm and can only truly be fought and won on the spiritual plane.

The second thing is Paul assumes their acknowledgment of the spiritual realm.

These people had grown up seeing and witnessing the spiritual realm. They were aware of its realities and of the power and impact it had around them and on them.

But they had prospered, become influential and powerful and maybe they had lost sight of the spiritual nature of their endeavor.

And they lost sight of the fact they were engaged in spiritual warfare with a spiritual enemy whose only aim and delight is the destruction of God's people.

Maybe they did not understand how the church was growing and still they were being persecuted.

Maybe they were struggling with the concept of persecution.
We can get like that.

So here is Paul again writing from prison reminding them that the battle they engaged in is spiritual and the enemy they face is spiritual.

So they need to deal with it on a spiritual level, not a soulish level.

The third thing we notice is - and we shall focus on this this morning – is that Paul says: “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.”

Be strong in the Lord.

In the Lord.

Here is a church facing growth.
Dealing with success and persecution

He doesn't say: “Be strong in yourself”

He does not say: “Be strong in you own might”

He doesn't say form a lobby group or a political party,

He is not saying that the answer is a Positive Mental Attitude.

Do these things work? To a degree, yes.
Do they have a positive impact?
Yes.

But they only give you temporary relief

Be strong in the Lord is what Paul tells them.

But there comes a point that in the heat of the battles of life that you want to be able to rely on a power greater than yourself.

Friend, all ground troops know the comfort that both artillery and air support brings.

So what does this mean?

I have heard this preached before, or I received council from people before, they will say, John, you just have to be strong in the Lord

And I just look at them kind of weird and go ...UHHH?

Have you ever had those moments when Christian people say stuff to you that doesn't make any sense?

They might know what they are talking about...but I don't have a clue

I look at them and I wonder if they know what they are talking about or are they just quoting something someone else told them

And then I ask them...

How do you do that?

Tell me how to be Strong in God?

Then tell me why be strong in God?

Tell me what steps to take?

And invariably people would get bent out of shape or what they would say wouldn't make sense to me

I am having financial troubles or marriage troubles over here, how will being strong in God work for me?

And when you say those words, what do those words mean?

Well they obviously meant something to the Apostle Paul and they obviously meant something to the church at Ephesus

And they obviously work

And they were obviously the answer to what they needed to hear

Because the church at Ephesus would grow and prosper many years after Paul died. In fact the Apostle John would spend his last days on earth there.

I think before you can answer the how to question, you need to settle the why question...why do I need to be strong in God?

So Why do we have to be strong?

First of all because the enemy is powerful.

John 10:10 ESV

(10) The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

I didn't say the enemy was non-evasive

I didn't say the enemy could hurt you.

In fact the enemy wants to inflict greed, pain and destruction upon you at every instant.

I know we have said that the battle has been won and that is true.

However never underestimate the devil's desire to destroy your life.

Never underestimate his commitment to attempting to destroy that which God loves most.

I didn't say the enemy was non-evasive

I didn't say the enemy could hurt you.

In fact the enemy wants to inflict greed, pain and destruction upon you at every instant.

There are three aims of Satan:

To kill all that God loves

To destroy all that God loves

And to steal from those that God loves.

He wants to steal your joy, rob your peace, destroy your church, kill your marriage, and destroy your health

1 Peter 5:8 ESV

(8) Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Like a roaring lion he is looking for, and seeking whom he may devour.

This means that he can't devour all.

Have you ever seen a lion hunt?

It stalks a herd.

It looks for the lonely

The weak

The sick

Or the isolated

And the pride works at cutting of those individual animals from their heard so they can be picked off and consumed.

The devil is not trying to attack all Christians at once, just those that will allow themselves to be found alone and away from the main body of soldiers.

Remember in our introduction that we talked about the amour of the soldier is that of an occupying force, not an invading force.

I mentioned how it was not the armor of full battle.

Because we have already won!

And that the enemy is now engaged in terrorism and skirmish attacks.

Like the lion, the terrorist only attacks that which is vulnerable, that which is weak.

The idea is for the terrorist is to provoke and draw a soldier away from the barracks away from his unit and attack him when he is isolated, vulnerable, out numbered and unarmed.

I see this happen all the time.

People allow bitterness,

Rebellion,

Pride,

Anger,

A haughty spirit to isolate them from others in the body of Christ,

They get away from the unit. They have no back up. They are outnumbered and under armed. They have no covering; they have no support because they have no church.

That was the great lesson learned by the US military in Somalia in what has become known in popular culture as Blackhawk Down.

A group of under trained terrorist, killed members of a superior military force because they were able to isolate them and pick them off one by one.

The greatest danger to your Christian walk and victory is you,
Your pride
And your flesh.

I would rather be in submission, than right
I would rather be in fellowship than isolated.

I have done both.

One is tragic and destructive; the other is a season where you just suck it up and deal with your stuff and let God take care of the rest.

To walk in love, peace, forgiveness and humility takes great strength. That is why we must be strong. And as Paul said: *strong in the Lord*.

The second reason you have to be strong is because the days are evil.

Lets look at some verse before this that led into Paul's closing comments.

Eph 5:15-16

(15) Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,

(16) Making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

It is an evil day we live in because,

The killing of innocent children has become a constitutional right.

To speak out on biblical grounds against ungodly sexual practices is illegal in most countries and will soon be in ours.

Evil is institutionalized and funded by your tax dollar.

SO BE STRONG

It is an evil day we live in because Sin is embraced, worship, funded 'protected, organized, accepted and entrenched.

SO BE STRONG

It is an evil day we live in because the church herself appears to be confused and confounded.

It denies the gospels,
The power of God,
Christ and even its own right to exist.

SO BE STRONG

Because, Christians everywhere are struggling.

They are desperate for a voice to arise.
Some one to say: "It is ok to believe the truth". "You don't have to compromise."

I feel the weight of this more than anything as a leader and a preacher of the gospel

There is an assault against the foundations of our faith and this is not the time to hold back

This is not the time to second-guess ourselves.

SO BE STRONG

We live in a part of the country where the supernatural is denied and if you have a passion for Jesus Christ you are labeled a fanatic.

Long ago I learned that a fanatic was someone who just loved something a little bit more than you do.

We have to be strong!

Why?

What if all the Body of Christ needed was a group of people to trust?
One group of people to believe in,
One group of people to rally behind and then together they would make a stand.

I want to be apart of that group.
I want to be apart of the group of people that brings courage hope and faith to the rest of the world. Because they were strong!

The Roman army was a professional army. But not all armies where like that. The Greeks were not.

The main Greek army armies were volunteers, poets, potters and Sheppard's. But then there were the Spartans. Born to fight, trained to win. The nation of Greece knew that if the Spartans went to war – the nation had a chance.

One small collection of villages set the tone for a nation for over 300 years!

You don't need the majority to win
You just need to be a more passionate minority!

Thirdly so we can overcome and not succumb to temptation.

Pro 24:10

(10) If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.

There was a time when a man's home was his castle and he could more or less shut out the world and protect his family to a certain degree from the evil that surrounded them

That's no longer the case. The fight of faith has become difficult and strenuous for Christians.

We have television, radio, Internet, newspaper, text messages, email –a cacophony of white noise – little of it helpful, most of it harmful.

All of it is a distraction and division.

There was a time when a man would have to go looking for pornography – that is not the case any more – perversion surrounds.

There was a time when a lady could just wear a wedding ring and people would respect the fact that she was married and not try to seduce her – that is not the case any more

I am not advocating a closed Brethren or an Amish approach to life.

But I am saying that you need to remind yourself that this is a spiritual activity we are engaged in and we will only ever know true victory through spiritual means.

That you need to guard and protect not only yourself but also your family from the forces of evil and the influence of Satan

If you faint in the day of adversity.... your strength is small!

So How do you be strong in His might?

First of all you have to trust Him

Now I know that might sound strange, but my experience is that most Christians do not trust God

The reason for this is that in the areas, particularly of spiritual warfare God has been misrepresented and His truths distorted.

Works based salvation or works based faith is one where you are told that if you do a certain thing in a certain way then you get a certain result.

If you pray a certain way you will get healed

If you give a certain amount, you will prosper financially.

If you do a certain thing, God will bless you

The challenge is that when you do that thing, give that thing, pray that thing and nothing happens, the basis for your faith – which was works and the word of man, is eroded, you no longer trust God because he has been misrepresented by His representatives.

We must believe that God is sovereign.

That the accomplishment of His will is not dependant upon our wishes or our effort.

God does not need our help to heal our bodies, feed our families or protect our lives

We must realize that what our prayers do is align our heart and life to His Purpose and plan.

Am I saying you need to do nothing to walk in the fullness and blessing of God?

That we need not pray?

We need not work?

We need not look after ourselves...not at all
What I am saying is that HIS covenant with us grants us those things,
we cannot earn those things, we have to trust Him for those things,
thank Him for those things and believe Him for those things.

Second, you must not only believe that He is almighty to do, but that this is almighty to defend.

That God does not only what to expand His kingdom but He wants to and has the power to defend the “good “ He has taken

Sometimes in scripture God is described as strong.
Sometimes in scripture God is described as mighty.
Sometimes in scripture God is described as almighty that is: strong and mighty.

The significance for us is that we must grasp the significance of God’s infinite, almighty power.

You must have settled it in your heart that this is true.

We must come to a place of not just giving head knowledge to the concept of a mighty God but heart knowledge.

We must know it and believe it.

God will look after his own

Listen to what it says:

“The *POWER* of His *MIGHT*”

Two definitions for you:

Might is inherent strength.

Power means the manifestation of the potential of might.

A car engine is like that.

You don't know how mighty the engine is until you see the power it can put out

Doing bench presses is like that.

About 2 weeks ago we stated back at training after a break for a while because my schedule got crazy.

So we had had a break and we came back talking smack about how awesome we were going to be. About how mighty we felt after the couple of weeks off

We got on the bench and the first set was easy
Toasted it

The second set, lots of man noise and grunting...awesome

Then I started talking smack
I was feeling mighty.
I was standing and feeling my inherent strength.

We increased the weight by 50 lbs

I got down and I realized I wasn't as powerful as I thought

The problem was neither was that the person encouraging me in this endeavor was not feeling very powerful either, my spotter.

The bar went up..... I held it...then things went horribly wrong...

He was laughing so hard he was of no use whatsoever.,
I was strangling myself vacillating between praying and swearing

And the result was that yet again we proved that we are 'those guys' that other cool people make fun of in the locker room.

God is not like that. His is both mighty and powerful.

You must look at God and realize there is great strength and there are great powers.

You don't have to chant a prayer or mumble an incantation, you look at Him, remind yourself to do His goodness and greatness and His sure ability to deliver you from ANY and ALL situations and you give thanks that you are on His side.

Thirdly, you need to realize that you are weak.

In fact I would go so far as to say that you should be actively and passionately hiding behind or running to God when you meet every trail and every temptation.

This is one of the main benefits of reading the scripture regularly. It reminds you of who God is and who you are.

I can honestly say that every time I have ever seen the hand of God delivered me was not because I prayed the right prayer, but because I cried out in a loud voice desperate for deliverance!

Often we face things in life that stretch our soul beyond what we think we can bare. When you are in the midst of a trial or tribulation you can trust and believe in God.

Without God's strength you cannot face or have any hope of victory in your current situation.

That is why you need to trust God!

Deliverance is something that happens when the force external to you over powers the force you are internally dealing with.

Nations at time need a deliverer. People at times need a deliverer.

They need someone to draw along side them and rescue or redeem them out of the mess and mire of their life.

When facing temptations, when facing obstacles, when facing challenges to your faith,

When the enemy seems to be winning. When he seems to be overwhelming you....

Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

You don't have to be strong in your might. You don't have to be strong in your power. You don't have to try and rescue or save yourself.

You can rest and be assured that on God's might in God's power your deliverance lays.

The forth reason is that God is reliable

Look down through history.
The history of the bible,
The history of the church, God is mighty to save.

Num 23:19

(19) God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

You can trust in God's ability to deliver you.
You have got historical proof of His power and victory over the enemy.

Rev 12:11

(11) And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

Look back at your own life and you will see the mighty hand of God available and ever present to deliver and save.

Pull out your journal,

Go back and read the times and the accounts of God's intervention and deliverance

The fifth reason you can trust in God is because of His eternal desire and love for you.

Man may be called wise, called merciful, called powerful.

But it is only God who is All mighty and All merciful and All powerful.

God has an eternal desire for us, as His creation .He wants us to recognize Him for who He truly is!

God demands that we recognize and call him Almighty.

God expects us to trust Him, even if we do this poorly.

We are not to argue or reason but submit and trust.

Submit to His will and trust in His passion and love for us.

We are His peculiar people, His chosen people.

He loves us, He is for us.

He has an eternal desire for us.

Because of this we can trust Him.

Because on this we know He shall deliver us the evil and the temptation that besets us.

Conclusions

Over the coming weeks we shall look at how we walk this out

But it starts with you realizing that you must walk this out

You must trust God

Some of you are here and your experience with religion and church has left you fearful of God, not faithful

You are hesitant to trust because of the works and words of men

I am sorry about that,

And I apologize for that,

But it is time that you get over that,

It is time for you to again realize that God is for you and wants you to trust Him and walk with him.