

We're in a battle (3)

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[0 : 00] So we're going through a short series entitled We're In A Battle, and today we're going to be looking at the subjects of prayer. If you do read the church diary, you'll see that things are now a bit adrift in terms of the titles and so forth because we should have been looking at this last week.

So the key passage is in Ephesians, and it's chapter 6, verses 10 to 18, and if you have a Bible, please have that open at that point.

It's on page 1177, if you have a church Bible. And what I would say is that there will be a number of scriptures on the screen, and each will have the page number of the Bible against it.

We won't necessarily be looking at every single scripture, so just to note, if you've got pen and paper, you can make a record of that. And these are also up on the website when the sermons go up online so that you get the same slides.

You can look at that as well afterwards. That's not on at the moment.

[1 : 12] Ah, okay. Well, Tim's going to turn it down a bit, I think. Is that loud enough?

I'm sorry. How is that? Okay. Thanks for pointing that out because it'd be really annoying to have that for half an hour, wouldn't it? So, we've been going through this, and I'm now going to rapidly go over the material of the last two weeks, and I'll try to be fast on this.

So, the Bible is full of the language of warfare, and the passage that we've read is undoubtedly about a battle. And it's about a battle that involves every single Christian, and that means us here today in this building, we're involved in a battle.

It's not a physical battle. It's a spiritual battle. Every Christian is involved. And how has it been for you this past week? I rather think we've been touching on dangerous subject matter in these last two weeks.

And it would not be surprising if the devil has not been attacking us personally in some ways, as he would try to do so as a church. So, how has it been for you in this past week?

[2 : 33] Have you known something of this battle? Well, I think as a Christian, we should know something of the battle, and that we should be aware of this.

So, it would not be surprising if you've not had some difficulties, even in this last week. So, here's a peaceful field near Brussels.

But on the 18th of June, 1815, that peaceful field was actually the Battle of Waterloo. And this was a climatic battle.

It was only one day long, but nearly a quarter of a million men were involved in that battle. And 50,000 people were killed and wounded on that one day.

It was an enormous battle. And one could hardly imagine it happening in such a peaceful place like that. And that's part of the irony and the tension of the Christian life, in a way, that is our life like that or is it like that?

[3 : 32] And the Bible gives a picture that suggests that actually both things are true. And they happened at the same time. And that we can know an immense measure of peace and comfort and encouragement from God and his protection.

But there's also an amount of battling going on at the same time. Christians in the past have spoken about this.

I've never won an inch of the way to heaven without fighting for it, said Charles Spurgeon. What a truth that is. Secondly, we thought about the question of who is the enemy?

Who are we actually fighting? On the field ground of Waterloo, the two main protagonists were the commanders of the two armies. Napoleon Bonaparte leading the French troops.

The Duke of Wellington leading the Allied troops. They'd never met in battle before. It's a very interesting story. They were both well-renowned generals.

[4 : 36] They were at the top of their game, as it were. They'd never met in battle before, but they knew each other very well. They knew how they fought.

They knew the tactics. And as you see the Battle of Waterloo and read about what actually happened, you see that the respective generals knew exactly what was going on.

And they behaved according to type. The Duke of Wellington so respected Bonaparte that he said, to have him on the field of battle is worth 40,000 troops.

And Napoleon Bonaparte, although he was very dismissive of the Duke of Wellington in public, was extremely conscious of this man who'd never lost a battle. And he didn't lose it on that day, although it's a very close thing.

Know your enemy. Well, here are possible enemies that all of us face. And you've had all of this this past week, I'm quite confident. Your circumstances, the world in which we live, other people, and ourselves, these can all be issues of an enemy for us.

[5 : 51] A battle and a struggle that we face. But here in Ephesians chapter 6, and now you can turn to the Bible and see in verse 12, 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.

Strong language. It doesn't really fill it out a great deal more. But there's a not and a but. And there's a warning to us not to get so hung up on these issues as to miss the main point.

The main point being that all these things are manipulated in this world by forces of personalized evil, which has been the case since the beginning of this created world.

The Garden of Eden has a serpent. The serpent speaks. And from the very beginning, man is under attack.

And we see that warfare continuing throughout the whole of the Bible story. It's the grand back picture to the Bible story. This is a way of understanding and interpreting what we read inside the Bible.

[7 : 11] Here is this fallen angel, the devil, who is constantly at warfare with God. And we are sucked into this process and involved with it.

The battle Christians are engaged in is between God and the devil. And we're in the firing line because we are part of God's purposes.

And the devil is particularly strong against Christian people because we have been taken out of his kingdom of darkness and brought into the marvelous light of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

No wonder we have changed sides. God has changed the sides for us. God has changed the sides for us. And so we are in the targets of the devil.

And the story of Job that we looked at is a very graphic telling of the nature of this battle and the nature of behind the scenes, the devil attacking God through the person of Job, through all the losses that he suffered, and in particular in his own trust and confidence in God.

[8 : 23] Could the devil persuade Job in the end to curse God and to turn away from him? Well, that was the tactic. And so it goes on throughout the whole of that story.

But Job kept his integrity, kept his confidence in God, and God in the end applauded him and rewarded him and encouraged him in a very open way.

And may that be true of each one of us, that we are people who endure to the end, we overcome and receive the blessings that God offers to those of his children.

Because the devil is a very powerful enemy, and he can appear as a roaring lion. So it says 1 Peter 5, 8 and 9. But sometimes as an angel of light.

2 Corinthians 11 verse 4. Interestingly, that particular passage is set in the context of a church, and the dangers of false teaching coming into churches, so that that false teaching can be properly characterized as the work of the devil, and that those who are responsible for false teaching are being used by Satan in that manner.

[9 : 39] So I'm trying to use Bible language to describe the situation, why it is such a serious matter, why clear gospel teaching from the word faithfully brought is so important.

In the battles of our lives, are we fighting the right enemy? That's a good point. Are we fighting the right enemy? On the day of the Battle of Waterloo, Napoleon set apart about 10,000 of his troops to go off in another area to fight against the reinforcements that were coming from Marshal Blucher, who was handling the Prussian army, which was coming to support Wellington.

It was a bad mistake. He needed those 10,000 troops to be fighting Wellington, but they were 10 miles away, having another battle.

I want to suggest to you that sometimes we make a bad mistake by not recognizing the devil and his tactics, and fighting the wrong battles.

We're fighting the wrong enemy. There's too much fighting against our circumstances. Christian people, I want us to be warned about this. The world fights against circumstances.

[10:56] It really struggles against the circumstances of life. We need to be careful because we know that our God is a God who is sovereign over all things. Whether our days are good or bad, there is a sovereign presence of God.

So we need to be careful that we're not too overwhelmed by the thought of justice for me. Nor shall we be too wracked with this thought of somebody who really gets on our nerves, feeling that they're our enemy.

They're just another person. It's a personality clash. Please don't spend too much of your energy fighting against another person, trying to remove them from the scene, trying to get your own back. Is that a Christian way of behaving? Remember the devil is behind these things. To use those things, to distract us, to detract us from following God wholeheartedly.

We need to be able to see what he is doing so that we can adequately address the real problem. The word here in Ephesians 6 encourages us constantly to be people who stand.

[12:12] I reminded you that at the Battle of Waterloo, the most important thing for the Allied troops was to stand. Not to retreat, not to retreat, but to stand. That's exactly what they did.

They won the day by standing firm. They did not move their ground. They did not give an inch. They stood firm. That's exactly what Christian people are called to do.

Put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground and after you've done everything, to stand.

If that's what you've been doing this past week, that's exactly what God has called you to do. You might not feel that you've been making any advances at all. But if you've been standing and resisting the devil, well, that's victory for the Lord.

Submit yourselves then to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you, says James chapter four, verse seven. And it's a great encouragement, isn't it?

[13:19] The thought that an individual Christian could have that word addressed to them. Submit yourself to God. Resist the devil. He will flee from you. How is that possible? How is that possible when the devil is such a mighty power, so much stronger than us, so much cleverer than us?

That's the promise of the word of God. And it is true for us, and it can be true for us, because we rely on God's strength. Verse 10. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the power, and in his mighty power.

Our strength is in the Lord. It's encouraging for us to read Psalm 18 at the start of the service today, just to be reminded that God is our stronghold.

He is our tower. He is the one who is our safety and security. We are strong in him. But we also have work to do ourselves at the same time and in parallel.

We fight with God's armor, and this is the picture of the Roman soldier, which is portrayed by the Apostle Paul here with all the attributes, all the clothing which is necessary for a Roman soldier to properly fight.

[14:35] And I reminded you last week that if you saw that man coming towards you, you knew only one thing was happening. This person meant serious business. This isn't not play acting.

This was a real soldier with deadly weaponry and very significant strong armor. And we are called not to be putting on these physical pieces of armor, but the things which have to do with spiritual matters.

Here is Paul again, speaking to the Corinthians. We're living in the world, but we're not going to wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.

On the contrary, the weapons we fight with have divine power to demolish strongholds. Amazing thought. And I want you to notice that in this passage in particular, there is encouragement for Christian people to arm themselves with spiritual truth.

The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, gospel, faith, salvation, the word of God. All the things that we find within the Bible and which are revealed to us by God's Holy Spirit.

[15 : 58] These are the things which keep us safe and strong in the Lord. That is how we are to stand. And in particular, we refer to the word of God, the use of the word of God.

And we saw how Jesus, how he resisted the devil at his time of temptation by the use of the word of God. And it's kind of like a standing rebuke to us that the Son of God himself chose not to use all the other armor and weaponry he could have done, but he uses this and he is so confident that this is the very means of attacking the devil as he comes to him in his mighty power.

Three times he uses the scriptures that he knew in order to resist the devil. And the devil left. And he threw up last week a whole number of sort of case studies about how we might apply the word of God.

Are we sinning again? And the devil comes to us and says, well, you're a spiritual failure. God won't accept you or listen to you. That may be just how you're feeling today.

So what's your response to that? You could well say, you're absolutely right. I'm a spiritual failure. I should just leave the building. I keep on falling and failing.

[17 : 24] But the word of God says to us in 1 John 1 9, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

That's why we prayed before we begun this message. Lord Jesus, please cleanse us of our sin. Why should I be cleansed? Not because I'm good enough.

Not because I deserve it. But because you have died upon the cross that my sin might be forgiven. And I come on the basis of what you have done and the promise of your word.

Please forgive my sin. And so we might go through a whole litany of different issues. You're worried about your health, your relationships, the housing, the children, the future.

And the devil says, well, you should be giving far more attention to these matters. Why be in church on a Sunday when you could actually be doing your job at work and getting promotion?

[18 : 25] Because it is a sacrifice. I remember when I was a student, most of the students were working on Sundays. Today, most of the students work on Sundays.

And to give Sunday aside and say, this is the day I'm going to give to the Lord, well, that's a challenge, isn't it? It's one-seventh of your week. But I think Christian people can say, we've never been at a loss as a result of keeping one day special.

We've never been hurt and damaged in our lives by keeping one day special for the Lord as he's asked us to do. We've been blessed by it. We've been helped.

God has looked after us. Just one area where in obedience to God, God looks after the rest. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, says Jesus, and all these other things will be added to you.

That's a real encouragement today and you need to hold on to that. Especially there are some things which are very strong in your heart and mind and you're just wishing these things to happen. But the first thing to do is to make sure of your relationship with the Lord and to be following him.

[19 : 46] Using the word of God. So have we used the word of God this week? Have we used the word of God this week? The question is not have we read the word of God but have we used the word of God?

I think there are probably plenty of practical, very practical applications of the word that we might use. And well, may God give us trust in him and confidence in the word to recognize that what he says, what he commands, what he promises, what he offers is available for each one of us to use in our everyday lives.

And so we come to prayer because this is the final verse of this particular section. I read it to you and pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

with this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. This morning, we're going to look at the first sentence and pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

This is an essential part of this passage about the spiritual battle. It's not just a PS at the end of it, nor is it an additional piece of the armor. It's not as if Paul was saying, well, you've got the righteousness, you've got the shield of faith, and now just tack on the issue of prayer.

[21 : 20] Rather, prayer is something that needs to be a constant in all our battling and on all occasions. Surely this is a reminder that our spiritual fighting cannot be mechanical, but it must be relational.

It's not enough to know Bible truth. It's not enough to use Bible truth. All must be bathed in an attitude of prayer.

God's truth reveals the truth about God's character and about ourselves. So a right use of God's word is taking to heart and into our situation God's character.

God says, God says, I will never leave you or forsake you. And we see and say in responsive prayer, Oh God, as you have said, please do not leave me or forsake me.

This is a spirit of dependence on God. This is saying, I haven't got confidence in myself.

[22 : 33] I cannot rely upon my own strength, wisdom, cleverness, tenacity, experience. I need to come to God and put my confidence in him.

Please turn to Psalm 11 on page 548. There's a riches in the psalm about this particular idea of dependence on God.

So he writes, verse one, in the Lord I take refuge. How can then you say to me, flee like a bird to your mountain?

For look, the wicked bend their bows, they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart. When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?

Well, that's an open question. When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do? And here we are in this city where it does seem like the foundations are being destroyed.

[23 : 49] What can the righteous do? The answer is in the first verse. In the Lord I take refuge. In the Lord I take refuge. The calamities that are all about us force us and should force us to the place where we say, oh God, I'm taking refuge in you.

Oh God, I don't understand what's going on. I'm taking refuge in you. Psalm 16 on the next page. Keep me safe, oh God, for in you I take refuge.

I said to the Lord, you are my Lord. Apart from you I have no good thing. What a blessed and a happy place it is for us to come to where we can say, apart from you there's nothing that's really good.

Some of us take a lifetime to experience that reality and to prove it. Please don't keep hedging your bets on that point and sitting on a fence and saying, well, there are other things that could be as good as this.

I say to the Lord, you're my Lord. Apart from you I have no good thing. Reminds me of Peter in the boat and Jesus is saying to them at one point, what about you?

[25 : 20] What are you going to do? Peter says, Lord, where shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Where else are we going to go?

Who else are we going to look to? What is the real hope in my life? You have the words of eternal life. If you're not a Christian this morning, I want to suggest that you'll probably be spending the whole of your life if you're not a Christian in trying to find the good thing.

What will you come to at the end of your life? What will that amount to? It's a blessed thing that this writer here and many of us here today can say, I found it.

I know the answer to that question. Apart from you, it's no good thing. Trust in the Lord with all your heart.

this is surely the right place to be. Notice the attitude of the writer in this place.

[26 : 37] This is not a cool or detached or relaxed comment. It's earnest. It's urgent and it's wholehearted. Of course, it's a time of battle and confusion.

Oh God, you're the only one. Who else can I turn to? Do you remember the story that Jesus told of two men going into the temple to pray?

There was a Pharisee who was a religious person and there was a publican, that means he was a tax collector, a very despised person. He had a job that was looked down upon.

And Jesus tells about these two prayers. The first man gets up, the Pharisee gets up and he says, my God, I thank you that I am not like other men.

I'm not like this man. I pay a tithe and my taxes I fast. This is what I do. That's my prayer to you today.

[27 : 43] Thank God I'm not like the others. Lots of words, impressive prayer. prayer. And then Jesus turns the camera to the other man, the other man who's beating his breast, bowing down.

And all he has to say is, God be merciful to me, a sinner. That's all he's able to offer. That's all the prayer that he's able to bring.

But what a prayer. Jesus said, which of those went home justified? Which of those had a prayer that was heard?

Surely the man who was earnest and urgent and all that he could say was, God have mercy upon me, a sinner. Maybe that's the prayer you should be praying today.

If you've been away from God and never known him, that's a prayer to be made. God have mercy upon me, a sinner. That's a prayer that will unlock the heart of God.

[28 : 56] That's a prayer that God will definitely hear and he'll come to you and give you his light. And as we turn to God in our extremity, he saves us and as we, and we have learnt something precious.

And so, through the places of conflict, we learn something precious as we are bought into that risky, unstable, uncomfortable place of not relying upon ourselves but relying upon God.

God. We have drawn near to God and we have proven that as we draw near to God, he draws near to us.

Secondly, please notice the second phrase, pray in the spirit, says the apostle. Pray in the spirit on all occasions. Some older Bible translations express there's a spirit with a small s.

So, the meaning would be be spiritual in your praying, not fleshly. Just speaking words is not the kind of prayer that God listens to. And that's a good and a biblical point, of course it is.

[30 : 20] But, the modern translations have surely brought out something more helpful here, which reminds us of what we read about in Romans 8.26.

Romans 8.26. Well, the apostle's been speaking about the groaning that takes place in Christian people as they long for the coming age, the new heaven and the new earth in which, with new bodies, we shall celebrate our gracious God and Savior.

He says in verse 26, in the same way, think of the groaning, the spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the spirit because the spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. We do not know what we ought to pray for.

This is fundamentally true, but even more so in times of spiritual conflict. We can easily be confused, misled, and uncertain. So it is God's kindness to us that he helps us.

[31 : 50] He comes alongside. The Holy Spirit personally intervenes and intercedes for us. God searches the heart of the praying Christian and he hears another voice.

What a beautiful and encouraging thought. Our praying may be muddled, erratic, but still it is heard because of the interceding work of the Holy Spirit. But there's more.

The Holy Spirit not only intercedes for us, but reveals to us God's mind in a particular situation. We don't know what to pray for, but the Spirit not only intercedes for us whilst we are in darkness and confusion, but sheds his light on our situation so that we do begin to understand how to pray about it.

James 1 verses 2 to 6. Here's the context.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds. Because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

[33 : 17] Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. So the context is trial, difficulty, maybe circumstances, maybe other people, maybe persecution, maybe sickness, maybe a very specific attack of the devil, but in any case it's a trial, it's a test, it's something which is, to use Bible language, very perplexing, upsetting, difficult to handle and face.

And so he goes on to say this in verse 5, if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask of God who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given him.

So in my times of trial and testing, I do need wisdom. And here's a very specific encouragement and promise from God that as I need wisdom to know how to handle the testing points of my life, can ask God and he will give it to me.

the Spirit reveals God's mind to us, he shows us what to do as we come in prayer to him. Please take that for your encouragement today, whatever testing you're facing, just to know that, well, it's good to talk with other people about it, not very good to spend half the night worrying about it, but it's certainly very profitable to come to God about it and to start the prayer saying, I don't know what to do, please give me wisdom.

It may take some time for God to show his way, but it's a good dependent prayer, isn't it? To be saying to God, please show me what I should be doing.

[35 : 23] Are you in a time of trouble? Are you coming to God in prayer, asking for wisdom as to how to think about and to handle this situation?

Any time in all kinds, pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. This encourages us to know that any time is a good time for prayer.

prayer. There is never an inappropriate, inauspicious, or awkward moment. Our God is truly a 24-7 prayer-hearing God.

And coupled with that is the thought that any kind of prayer is acceptable. There are times when extended persevering prayer is needed in life, but other times when the situation may only allow something brief, one sentence long, abrupt, without introduction or ending, crises, moments, may well fall into that category.

If you're in a group of people and you're handling a situation and you're needing to make a decision fast, then I would suggest that the crying prayer is all that's available to you.

[36 : 43] Oh God, please help me. But what a shame if we miss the opportunity and instead rely upon our own wisdom. Our immediate and very human reaction may be anger, a crossword, a harsh attitude.

Well, we know full well that the devil can get it at that moment. anger is the devil's foothold into our lives. How we need a counterbalancing cry to God for help and for forgiveness.

Forgiveness if we need to ask for that. Being in that place where prayer will not be strange and out of place. Philippians 4, 6 encourages, do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God.

The Ephesians verse also reminds us that all kinds of prayers and requests are completely acceptable. Our daily bread is a good territory as well as occasional crises.

In fact, a daily dependence as taught in the Lord's Prayer, give us today our daily bread, is exactly the kind of dependence that will make us truly thankful in the details of our lives.

[38 : 09] So when we gather for prayer as a church in small groups on Wednesdays and Sunday nights, this richness and diversity should fill the content and style of our praying.

Please God that we might have more of a sense of a dependence upon him so that it would be not an unnatural thing for us to call out to him at 9.30 on a Monday morning when the boss is wanting something on his desk and we haven't got it ready for him.

When the job is going badly wrong. When the cat's been sick on the floor and the washing machine is just broken down. I'd like to point you to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ which we read of earlier in the Gospel of Luke chapter 22 verses 39 to 46.

It's a very wonderful commentary on this verse provided by Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Although the devil is not mentioned by name in this passage or indeed the other parallel passages in Matthew and Mark this surely is a time of darkness oppression and extreme trial for the Lord when the very purpose of his coming into the world to give his life as a ransom for many was under threat.

Like the temptation in the desert God's purposes through his son were threatened and as in the desert the battle was such that heavenly comfort by an angel was needed and provided at the end.

[40 : 03] But there's something tangibly more intense and awful about Gethsemane. In the desert Jesus appears calm and sure here there is bodily emotional and spiritual anguish.

Jesus himself recoiled from the prospect but turned this into a prayer that defines his whole attitude to doing the will of God and sets us an abiding example.

It was through this prayer that any uncertainty as to God's will was blown away. It was through this prayer that he received God's strength to carry on even to death on the cross and it was through this prayer that the way to the cross was bulldozed clear our death took place and salvation for us was achieved.

What a precious important moment when we're given that wonderful insight into this private prayer of the son to his father. Here's an example for each one of us.

and for us brothers and sisters in this battle I say again victory is sure because Jesus Christ has already fought and won.

[41 : 27] He has disarmed the powers and authorities making a public spectacle of them triumphing over them by the cross. Happy people if we are joined with this.

blessed people if we received the blessings of Calvary. If Jesus on the cross has died for our sins and we have realized that truth for ourselves and we say what a wonderful savior. He is the one who's gone before the captain of our salvation blazed away triumphed gloriously through his cross raised to life vindicated by his father and now he is in heaven waiting for us so that where he is we will one day be. Let's sing our closing song what a friend we have in Jesus all our sins and griefs to bear. Amen. Amen. Amen.