

We're in a battle (2)

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[0:00] A very pleasant country scene, the sort of place that you'd like to have a long ramble over, a peaceful place, wide vistas, and yet on the 15th of June 1815, it was a scene of an enormous battle.

The Battle of Waterloo, when that very peaceful place was suddenly transformed into a place of confusion, of enormous destruction.

It was history-making. 240,000 soldiers were involved on the Battle of Waterloo.

That's almost the entire population of Brighton and Hove. The French army under Napoleon Bonaparte was fighting the allied British and Prussian armies under the Duke of Wellington and Marshal Blucher.

The fighting took place intensely over nine hours. It was fought over an area of approximately four square miles. And I bring that sort of stark bit of memory of history to you with the reminder that on that day, 50,000 people, soldiers, were dead or wounded.

[1:35] The intensity of the slaughter was immense, greater even than the Battle of the Somme in 1916. During those nine hours, terrible sights and dreadful things happened in this battle.

Now, the Bible is full of the language of warfare. We began to look at that last week, and I want to take this subject up again today. The passages that we've read have been a very strong reminder of the reality of that.

As a battle, there's a fight. And for Christians, this is particularly important. If you are a Christian today, you are involved in the fight of your lives.

It has always been this way. This is nothing new. In my prayer earlier, I referred to some of the problems and pressures that we face in this world. But there have always been problems and pressures.

And every Christian in every age faces a battle. It's a lifelong battle. We remembered last week the Apostle Paul and how he said, I have fought the good fight.

[2:52] I have finished the race. He comes to the end of his life, probably 60 years old. He looks back upon that life. It's been a life of remarkable experiences. But the way he sums it up, he says, it's been a fight.

This battle has been a fight. This life has been a fight for me. It affects every part of our lives. It affects us when we come to church and when we're not in church.

It affects us in our times of leisure as well as in our times of work. It affects us in our families, in our neighbors, in our friendships. It affects us in our thought life.

The things that we read affects us in the things that we see. Every part of our life is a battleground. And there are wounds.

There are casualties. There are Christians who have suffered incredibly in this battle. Apostle Paul, again, writing in 2 Corinthians, talks about the fact that he knows what it is to be cast down and yet not destroyed.

[4:00] To be brought that near to destruction and yet actually to survive because the Lord's hand has been upon him. So my question this morning really is whether you as a Christian think of your life and your anticipation of how life should be like this.

This very peaceful scene. It's a scene you can walk into. Lovely Saturday afternoon walk. A quiet place.

A stroll. Or whether you recognize that your life is actually something like this. That it's actually a battlefield.

Now many Christians have been sold the idea that life is actually like that and they're pretty disappointed. You may come here today and you may be a disappointed person because the thought was brought to you that somehow to be a Christian was to be brought into a much better place than the place you'd been in before.

A place of peace and prosperity. And so you may have been told, well if you've got a health issue, as a Christian you can come to God who always provides a healing.

[5:24] Are you struggling with money? Come to God and he has the money, he can give you the money. And such is some of the teaching that has been abroad for quite a while.

But it's not the Bible teaching. The Bible teaching is far more like this. Although I have to say that I think the reality of the Christian life is both together.

It's a battle, but there's peace. There's conflict, but there's comfort. That is the true balance and the tension of the Bible.

And so it has been for Christians throughout the ages. We do not become saints in our sleep.

Spurgeon says, I've never won an inch of the way to heaven without fighting for it.

Christian life is not a playground. It is a battleground. Jesus invited us not to a picnic, but a pilgrimage. Not to a frolic, but to a fight.

[6:41] Now as I've said, you may find that very disappointing. And you may try to put your head in the sand and say, well that's not going to be my experience. But I have to say to you, if you're going to be serious as a Christian person, then you will face serious conflict in your life.

There will be a significant battle that will take place. And you have to make up your mind whether this is something you're up for or not. Jesus spoke in a parable about getting ready for a fight, a battle, and having to count the cost.

Am I ready for this? Am I up for this? You need to ask that question. This is what the reading in Ephesians chapter 6 verses 10 to 18 is about.

What do we have just been reading about there? Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. There's a conflict taking place. Now, my second point is, we need to know the enemy.

Again, we touched on this last week. And I will repeat this point because there are a number of people here who may not have been here last week. There are possible enemies that all of us face.

[8:04] There are circumstances. You may come in here today and you feel, if only my circumstances were different. I don't have a job.

I wish I had a job. I do have a job, but it's too stressful. I wish it was a quieter job. I do have a job, but I'm not paid enough. If only I could get a rise.

Circumstances can be a very controlling feature of our lives. It's amazing how much time we can spend thinking about our circumstances and wishing that they were different.

The world is a dark and a difficult place to live. All kinds of temptations and pressures and confusion out there.

All the messages that come to all of us all the time. Other people. Now, other people are normally our biggest problem. People that we don't get on with.

[9:11] Sometimes in our own family. Sometimes the neighbor over the other side of the fence. It's amazing how people can get so wound up about neighbors. We're very blessed to have really good neighbors, both sides of us.

But I've seen people getting so twisted up about their neighbors. So they become ill over the matter of their neighbors that they live alongside.

Other people can be a problem. If only she wasn't like that. If only she didn't say the things that she does say. He's really annoying and frustrating.

This person I have to sit with next to at work. They're difficult. And then ourselves, if we're honest. Some of the biggest frustrations of life come from ourselves. There are things about ourselves that we don't like. That you still have to face up to.

[10:24] In spite of all of that. This is what we read in Ephesians chapter 6. You see it on the screen there. Our struggle is not against

flesh and blood. All those things, as big, as important as they are. And as much as we have to give attention to those issues. That actually, Paul says, on the basis of God's word. And the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That is not your biggest issue as a Christian. Our struggle is against something far bigger. Far more powerful. Far more invasive. Far more troubling. Against rulers. Against the authorities. Against the powers of this dark world. And against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. I'll put these words on the screen. That they may sort of linger there. Because this is so counter-cultural. To talk in this sort of language. If you're not a Christian today.

[11:36] Then you'll be certainly in the territory of saying. Well, my problem's in that area. But if you're a Christian. The Bible says your problem is not in that area. Your problem is in this area.

All those other areas. All those other areas. Ourselves. Other people. Other people. Circumstances. All those are areas in which. The dark powers of this world. The dark powers of this world are at work. Providing constant challenge to us. But behind the circumstance. Behind the personalities. Is something which is far bigger. And more insidious. And more difficult for us to handle. These are things that can't be seen. The devil and his agents. Are at work in this world. And there is a battle taking place.

[12:31] And if you're a Christian. You're in the front line. And you will be attacked. The battle Christians are engaged in. Is between God and the devil. And the Bible from beginning to end. From Genesis to Revelation. Speaks about this conflict. How the devil came at the very earliest moment. Of human history. And attacked God. Through his creation. Through Adam and Eve. Has God said? Suggested the serpent. And throughout human history. The devil has carried on. Whispering. Has God said? Can you believe. The things that God is saying? Trust yourself.

[13:30] This battle is between God and the devil. It's a cosmic battle. It involves the whole of human history. And it involves all of the creation. Of God. It's a battle that's taking place. Right now. And in this room. I'd like to draw your attention to the story in the Bible. Of a man called Job. You might have heard of Job and his comforters. It's a big book. Job was a man who feared God. God had blessed him. Blessed him with a large family. Blessed him with many possessions. Blessed him with a good reputation. Blessed him with a happy life. What could have been better? Just like that.

[14:32] Field that I had on the screen earlier. Life was going so well for Job. A man probably into his middle age by now. Looking forward to his retirement. Things could only get better and better for Job. Until he eventually went to be with the God that he had feared and served. He genuinely loved God. It says that he prayed for his children every day. He wasn't trusting himself. No, he looked to God. And we read in this story. That the devil. Came into this situation. And he said about this man Job. Job is only trusting God. For all the good things that God gives him. He doesn't really love God. He doesn't really fear God. Take those things away from his life. Then see how he reacts. So in that story. We read how Job.

[15:39] Lost all his family. They were all killed. Lost all his possessions. They were all taken away. Lost the respect of his own wife. And his body was covered in boils and blisters. Desperately uncomfortable. That's just the first two or three chapters of a book. Which goes on for another 37 chapters. The devil's hand was upon that man's life. But the devil's hand was only upon that man's life. Not because the devil was that interested in Job.

But he was interested in God. And he wanted to attack God through Job. And wanted to be able to demonstrate to God.

That all his wonderful work in this man's life was absolutely frail. Hollow. Worthless. And that was the battle.

[16:41] And it goes on for 40 chapters in that book. Because it wasn't just that he lost his wife. And his children. And his possessions. And his bodily health.

All the things which we would find so distressing. And so debilitating in life. It wasn't that. But then friends came to him.

And the friends came to him. And they said things to him. Which he found very hard to handle. About his own life. About the God whom he respected and knew.

And he just about hung on. He just about clung on. In his faith with God. But it was a battle. And I have to say. Looking back over that book.

You feel that the devil was also using the friends. To say things to Job. That really was damaging to his faith. He had to battle.

[17:39] Through all of that. Until God revealed himself again. To this man. And he applauded Job. And he was able to say to the devil. You've lost that one.

You've lost. He's my servant. And he trusts me. And Job won that battle. Glory came to God.

That story involving this man. Was part of the conflict. Between God and the devil. And so it is. In the passage that we read earlier. From Matthew. Jesus.

Just after his baptism. When God the father. Has revealed himself to his son. And said. This is my son. Listen to him. This sort of high point.

No coincidence. That the devil came in at that point. No coincidence. As God's plans. Were ratcheting forward. Another step. Something important.

[18:39] Was going to happen. There was going to be. A great push. Against the kingdom of the devil. So the devil comes to him. At that critical moment. And tempts him. In various ways. Tempts him.

On the matter of hunger. Because he was human. Tempts him on the matter of power. All the kingdoms of the earth. I'll give these to you. If you'll just bow down. And worship me. That's what he says.

It's the devil's attack. Against God. Because if he can destroy. The trust of Jesus. In his father. If he can divert. The purposes of God. In Jesus life.

Then a battle has been won. And it's remarkable to see. How throughout. The ministry of Jesus Christ. His life upon earth. So constantly.

Is he aware. Of the attack. And the presence of the devil. Always swarming around him. No coincidence. That people came to him. Who were possessed.

[19:35] By the demons. They were almost. Magnetically attracted. To the son of God. There was a battle going on. Of cosmic proportions.

And it's Jesus. Who says to Peter. His dear friend. When Peter says. In response to Jesus. Telling him. He's going to go to the cross. He's going to die upon the cross. And Peter says.

Far be it from you Lord. That will never happen. That will never happen. He doesn't just say. Peter you're wrong. He says. Get behind me Satan. Because you do not.

Speak the things of God. The devil is. Actively at work. In one of.

Jesus close disciples. Trying to encourage him. Not to go to the cross. Not to die upon that cross.

[20:33] Not to take the sins of mankind. Not to do the things. Which he'd come to earth to do. So terrible is this thought. And so tempting a thought. That Jesus says.

Get behind me Satan. This is our enemy. This is our enemy.

And he goes. As we hear from Peter. Around prowling like a roaring lion. Seeking. Looking for someone to devour. That's a dreadful picture isn't it.

I've seen lions in cages. That's fine. Lion outside of a cage. Seeking whom they may devour.

That's the picture that we're asked to take on board. But also. We're reminded in the Bible.

[21:32] That Satan can appear as an angel of light. Sweet reasonableness. Are we aware that the devil is both.

A roaring lion. And an angel of light. That he has many ways. Of attacking God through people. Thirdly.

How to stand. This is the passage that we were reading about. That we were reading earlier. You see repeated in those. Get your Bibles out. If you've got them there. Verse 13.

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. Stand firm then. It's an interesting phrase that's used there.

And I'm reminded again of the battle I referred to earlier. Waterloo. Where the Duke of Wellington set out the British army. Just on a ridge of land. And throughout the whole of that battle.

[22:42] The army stayed there. It was only at the very end. That they were able to move forward. The most important thing about winning the battle. Was that they were able to stand.

And not to fly. It was standing. This is exactly what Christians are called to do in their lives. They're called to stand.

That's the most fundamental point about being a Christian. Are you able to stand against the devil and his ways? Not fall. Not fall back.

Stand. Stand firm. Firstly. We need the strength of the Lord. Notice in verse 10.

Finally. Be strong in the Lord. And in his mighty power. That's the fundamental position that every Christian needs to be. To be saying.

[23:38] I'm weak I need the strength of the Lord in my life that's where we are throughout the whole of our Christian lives I'm weak I need the strength of the Lord you remember Paul when he was afflicted by this bodily ailment we don't know what it is where he says this came to me and I asked the Lord to take it away from me but the Lord said to me my strength is made perfect in weakness and he goes on to say therefore I'll rejoice in weakness because when I'm weak then I'm strong not strong in yourself but strong in the Lord now that's a great place to be isn't it it's something hopefully that all of us can identify with we're not asked to be strong in ourselves today we're asked to be strong in the Lord we're asked to be able to come to God in our weakness and say this is my prayer

I'm weak I need your strength to live this life I'm weak I need you today in my workplace I'm weak I don't know how to be a parent give me strength you can always pray that prayer it's an absolutely safe prayer it's exactly where God wants you to be at a place of weakness but you know it's a hard prayer because we're a proud people we like to be self-sufficient we think we can do it ourselves and so God brings things into our lives that again and again point out to us no actually you're weak I'll humble you so that you could recognize your weakness thank God that he does these things because otherwise we would get proud in our own resources and then we would be rich fodder for the devil's attacks we need to be weak it's not comfortable it's not pleasant but it's the only place for a Christian to be weak so that we can be strong and that's what the apostle says to these people in Ephesus a church just like this he comes to them and says in whatever situation you're facing in your life you need to be strong in the Lord and his mighty power you haven't got the power to stand against the devil in his ways you don't have it you can't learn it you'll never get it the only person who can properly stand against the devil in his ways is one who has a greater power greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world we need spiritual armor 2 Corinthians 10 verses 3 and 4 says this for though we live in the world we do not wage war as the world does the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world on the contrary they have divine power to demolish strongholds now Paul is speaking from experience here in his life he had to face many difficult situations and often he would have been tempted to adopt the world's techniques for handling the problems he faced and you know the way the world works you know you've got a friend in the right place put a word in the right place there you can fight issues with money with influence with worldly power with your own efforts and Paul says

I'm just keeping on putting that to one side I'm not going to go down that route I really want to challenge some of you in your work situations to be very careful that you're actually dealing waging your war not like the world but waging war as God wants you to what are you fighting with?

we need spiritual armor and so Paul draws attention to the most developed and advanced fighting machine of the age look at this man on the screen you think fancy dress look at this man in AD 60 coming down the road towards you and you recognize that is trouble if Paul had been born in 1815 or writing there he would have put a British soldier on the screen there and he'd have had a musket and all the rest of that but here is this guy here here is this soldier and the Romans had a highly developed strategic army people who were absolutely equipped with the up to date equipment to be able to fight the battles that needed to be fought because the Roman Empire was in a state of constant warfare and they had a large standing army and there you see on the screen the different aspects of that soldier and how he is equipped as I turn around it's easier to see isn't it? feet ready for action belt of truth shield of faith breastplate of righteousness helmet of salvation sword of the spirit that man is not play acting back in June of this last year 6,000 people gathered together at the field of Waterloo to do a reenactment it was very realistic they were all dressed in the right way there was a lot of smoke a lot of fire taking place and a lot of people watching as well no one got hurt it was just a reenactment just a play this is not a play this is for real this isn't some dusty history thing this is for real and Paul is saying that if you're going to stand as a Christian you are going to need to have the armour that God supplies so you have the picture but he then immediately transforms that picture into something different we need to be sure of spiritual truth with the belt of truth the breastplate of righteousness feet fitted with the gospel of peace a shield of faith a helmet of salvation and a sword of the spirit which is the word of God our weapons are not earthly weapons we don't fight in that way we need this and I want you to notice please this morning just how much and how focused this is upon the matter of spiritual truth that if we're going to fight as Christians we need to be armoured with spiritual truth not spiritual feelings which come and go but spiritual truth which holds firm and I believe that every single one of these pieces of armour has to do with a matter of truth the truth of God's word so the breastplate of righteousness

[31:15] I don't think refers to the matter of personal integrity as important as that is but more to the righteousness that Jesus Christ has put upon everyone who belongs to him the righteousness so that people can stand before God as his children the feet fitted with the gospel of peace doesn't this refer to the glorious hope that we have and the confidence that we're given because God has come to sinful people like us and given us good news because Jesus has died on a cross to take away our sins the shield of faith with which you can resist all the darts the fiery darts of the evil one it says we need faith this is the faith that we have trust in Jesus Christ who is our deliverer the helmet of salvation the sword of the spirit which is the word of God we need to be sure of spiritual truth you are putting yourself into a very vulnerable position if you've got no interest in spiritual truth you come to church and you say

I just like the experience of church just like being being in the atmosphere the religious atmosphere you can't fight the spiritual fight without being armoured with spiritual truth that's why we have a great emphasis in this church upon teaching the word of God because the truth of God is found in the Bible and this is where we must find our spiritual truth more than that more than that I want to encourage you to the idea that you need to be able to connect the truth you need to see how the truth of the gospel relates to righteousness and faith and salvation you need to see the broad sweep of Bible truth I'm delighted that young adults group is going through a course of study at the moment which is on the matter of doctrine they're looking at the grand things of the Bible which we call doctrine the issue of sin that we are born in sin that we are a depraved people that we're thoroughly wicked there's a grand teaching in the Bible on that subject you won't come to Jesus until you realize that you're a sinner that you are a sinner seeing how Jesus was prophesied in all the Old Testament times seeing how sacrifices were made foreshadowing for what was to come when Jesus died as the Lamb of God upon the cross seeing how the people of God so often fell away from God didn't follow him didn't go down his ways didn't obey him how like us seeing how Jesus came into the world lived a perfect life died a sacrificial death rose again from the dead now he's at God's right hand now he's praying for us now he's our great high priest and he's coming again now this is the great sweep of history this is the great sweep of Bible truth and we need to know this because all these things are necessary for us to be armored in our walk with God and to be able to stand against the devil and his lies because the devil comes to us and he says has God

said and we say yes he has said we need to be sure of spiritual truth we need to use the word of God so I remind you what we read earlier and it's a remarkable passage here is Jesus in the desert he's fasted for 40 days and 40 nights and the devil comes to him and tempts him now I want you to notice very clearly what Jesus does in response to that he uses the word of God he uses the scriptures he only had the Old Testament to use at that time and that's exactly what he uses they were the scriptures that he'd learned as a boy those are the scriptures that he'd had in eternity and he knows exactly what to say to the devil when the devil comes and tempts him three times the devil tempted him three times

Jesus uses the word of God and the devil leaves the devil leaves because nothing can stand against the word of God and we need to use the word of God and I'm going to put a few things on the screen here which hopefully some of us can identify with these are typical situations that we face we're sinning again you come into this place here and you've just had a bad week you've fallen into the same sort of sin as you've often fallen into before you're really fed up with yourself and the devil says call himself a Christian you're a spiritual failure God won't accept you won't listen to you how many times have you fallen in that way 1 John 1 9 if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness now that's a good response isn't it I've sinned again God is faithful to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness we just come to confess you start again don't go out of this door without starting again don't go out of the door with unforgiven sin there's no need to the devil would love you to do that you come in you go out no change God's word encourages you today it says that you can come again to him overwhelmed with problems devil says God doesn't look after you you've got even more problems than people who aren't Christians Psalm 23 verse 1 what does it say the Lord is my shepherd I shall not be in want the Lord is my shepherd I shall not be in want that's sufficient that's enough for you today just to know that now you're enjoying some success the devil says well you're pretty clever you're pretty clever some of us know some of this where people say yeah you're really good James 4 6 to 10 tells us humble yourselves under God's mighty hand don't be proud don't exalt yourself don't think of yourself more than you should be thinking recognize that everything you have comes from God it's humble people that God wants to come near to don't let pride become your clothing overcome by temptation and the devil says you'll never be able to resist why bother 1 Corinthians 10 13 says this there is no temptation taking you but such as is common to man and God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted more than you're able but will with the temptation give a way of escape that you may be able to bear it do you realize that whatever temptation you're facing and you think I can't stand against this

[39:17] God knows and he's giving you a way of escape so that you can escape that temptation Hebrews 4 14 to 16 talks about one who has been tempted in all points like as we are yet without sin that's Jesus the living Jesus at the right hand of God now our great priest he's there interceding for us and wonderful to know that he's been tempted in all the ways that we are but he battles through you're badly treated and the devil says that's unforgivable that's unforgivable some of you have been very badly treated some people have been very badly treated in churches and as a result of that they don't go to church anymore who's won have they won has anybody profited the devil's won you think you're badly treated at work you think you're overlooked and it's easy for that sort of canker of discouragement and disappointment and frustration to build up inside of you

I'm troubled when Christians get so wound up about their life situations and they feel they've been badly treated and somebody ought to do something about it well who's going to do something about it well leave it to God vengeance is mine says the Lord you think you've got enemies be kind to them that's the Christian way you don't feel like going to church today obviously not you because you're here I've got to say every empty seat here could have been filled with somebody who didn't feel like going to church today that's okay you need a break you don't need to go to church to be a Christian there's always another time kind of wrong on all fronts lie lie lie lie lie there's always another time wrong you don't know what a day will bring this may be your last time in a church you don't need to go to a church to be a Christian well what sort of Christian are you if you're not with brothers and sisters in Jesus

Christ what kind of belief do you have that doesn't involve with the very commandments that God gives us in his word Hebrews 10 25 gives us clear warning on this particular point let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing but let us encourage one another and all the more so as you see the day approaching so I will encourage you and you will encourage me to keep on meeting together we need to do that because that's exactly what God wants just remember in all this the devil is getting at God you're just collateral damage how great if the devil can say I've really broken that person's testimony they're not in fellowship their hearts become proud they're complaining they're a miserable person they say they're a

Christian but they give all the hallmarks of being unconverted the devil says great they're behind the lines they're in casualty they're in hospital they're well out of the battle now do you want to be like that or for the honour of Jesus Christ do you want to be in the front line and standing you're worried about your health relationships housing children the future the devil says you need to get a grip take more care about these things prioritize your work take on more work sad it is that people have to work Sundays sad it is that people have to work at the times when the church meets together and that's a challenge for you you've got to think about that and it's a risk but faith is a risk you may have to be saying some things like well I'm going to put God first so Matthew 6 31 33 says don't worry about all these things seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you all the things that you're concerned about

God will provide that's not glib that's not easy there's toughness there and sometimes we can't see where God is going to make provision but he says those that honor me I will honor put him first and you'll never be a debtor could anybody put their hand up and say I put God first and he's always supplied for me is that right you're fearful there's some people who are very fearful in life and the devil says you can't cope Psalm 27 verse 1 the Lord is my light and my salvation whom shall I fear loneliness you'll be like this the rest of your life and Hebrews 13 5 says God says I will never leave you or forsake you you've lost a lot but God will not leave you or forsake you he will be your comforter even in your loneliness land the habit of sin in your life it's only small no one will notice [45:33] James 2 verse 13 says something like if you fail in one part of the law you're guilty of sin against the whole of the law no sin is small I say well 90% of my life is okay it's in a good place I just don't want to get rid of those small things on the edges no one else can see it but God sees it what does he think about it you're not giving the whole of yourself to me you need to wrestle with that you need to face up to it you see what the devil is saying to you and in every case we need to go back to that and say this is the word this is what the word says we're on the winning side the God who writes all history has told us what's going to happen this is what's going to happen who shall separate us from the love of Christ through trouble hardship persecution famine nakedness danger sword now in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us for I'm convinced that neither death nor life neither angels nor demons neither the present nor the future nor any powers will be able to separate us from the love of

God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord it's the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord that's our security that's our delight that's our encouragement that's our hope as we face our futures that's what will help all of us to be able to stand for the honour of God and for the glory of Jesus Christ Amen■■■■

