

We're in a battle (4)

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[0:00] For the Christian, there's a battle. This is the language of the Bible, and in particular, in Paul's closing words to the Ephesian Christians.!

Verse 12, We are in a struggle, but the vivid picture language of these verses speaks to us of a raging conflict.

Secondly, our supreme and greatest enemy is the devil. We have many other obstacles and difficulties in life, circumstances, other people, ourselves, but the greatest problem that any of us has is that we are under attack in all these areas, and in fact in every area, by the personal enemy of God, the devil.

Our battle orders are to stand. Four times in this passage, the word stand is used. The Christian soldier is to stand, not to fall or to fall back, but to stand.

Fourthly, we do so by using spiritual armor. We rely upon the Lord's strength. Verse 10, Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

[1:28] We have the armor that God himself has supplied, especially God's revealed truth. And in verse 18, we're reminded that all of that is to be covered in a life of prayer.

So do you and I believe this? From the world's perspective, and I mean from the perspective of the people that you and I meet with in our week, our next door neighbors, and our families, and the people we work with, and the people we see at a distance, and the masses of people in this city, the vast majority of whom have no place for this in their lives, this is ridiculous.

This is laughable. This is the stuff of medieval legend. This is the kind of things that people go and see on screens, movies.

Talk of the devil and the battle. Talk of prayer and the life of prayer. Talk of our needing spiritual armor. Well, all this seems a million miles away from people's conception of what it is to live life. So you have a choice, which is to go down that route, or to say this is the word of God. This is what God has given us. This is what God is saying.

[3:04] And could any of us read this passage in any other way than to recognize the reality that we do have a battle? We do have a personal enemy.

We do need to stand. And we do need God's spiritual armor to do so. And it isn't just the preserve of some, but it is the calling and the placement of every single Christian.

To be a Christian is to be directly addressed by these words. So who is this message for? And you might rightly say, it is for me.

It is for me. In my life. And I do hope that over these last weeks when you've heard the message, you have been able to say, yes, this is my situation.

Because as Paul was writing to husbands and wives and to children and to employers and employees, or in that day, slaves, he was saying, well, all of you in your life situations, you are facing these things.

[4:17] And so it is in this group of people, there's a lot of diversity in our life situations and circumstances. And so the word comes to us in a very personal way.

But that is only one picture. And it's not the complete or even, I would suggest, the main picture. Because we're given direction to another picture at the end of verse 18 and then on into verses 19 and 20, which we didn't cover last Sunday.

And so this is what he says. He's been speaking about the life of prayer. And he says, with this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Pray also for me that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains.

Pray that I may declare it fearlessly as I should. So I draw your attention to the end of verse 18. And what the apostle says here is to be alert and to always keep on praying for all the saints.

[5:34] Now is it right to pray for yourself? Absolutely. Because you're a saint. But you've got a command as well as an encouragement here to actually be praying for all the saints.

So we did a good thing earlier when we prayed for those missionary friends because they're saints. And we do a great thing when we pray for one another because we are saints.

And you understand the word saint does not mean a particularly holy person but somebody who has been called and set apart by God as one of his own children.

To be a Christian is to be a saint. And to be a saint should be to be a prayed for person. To be a remembered person. It's not just about me.

It's not even primarily about me. But it's about us. And it's interesting that the apostle here encourages the believers to be praying for the saints.

[6:41] There are other passages in God's word where there is encouragement for us to pray for the world. Remember kings and those in authority. There we are. That's a question of prayer.

We should be praying for other people. And of course we pray for those who are not yet Christians. But in this particular passage he doesn't encourage that sort of a prayer.

He pray he rather encourages them to pray for the saints. And I think there's a very good reason for that. It's because the saints together form a community which the Bible calls church.

church and the church is particularly important in God's purpose. It's particularly important in this letter.

We'll look at two particular verses that help us on that. So Ephesians chapter 3 verses 9 and 10. The apostle says that his calling is to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery which for ages past was kept hidden in God who created all things.

[7:58] His intent was that now through the church the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.

There is something very very special about the church the church of Jesus Christ. It is the vessel it is the vehicle it is the showcase for the many sided aspects of the wisdom of God the wonder of his purposes.

there is something which is to be displayed by the church to the watching and in some cases the disbelieving and uncomfortable world around.

And in particular notice this he says that this wisdom of God is to be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. It's interesting because that's almost the same language as we're hearing in Ephesians 6 where Paul talks about the rulers authorities in the heavenly realms. Evil but still rulers and authorities and still designated as heavenly realms. It's the most amazing truth that through the church and I would say through the church rather than through individual Christians.

[9:34] Something remarkable is being displayed to the created order. Something amazing. Not just the created order that we can see but the unseen world of the heavenly realms.

in another place Paul speaks about how angels long to look into these things. They behold the church and they long to understand the nature of the great gospel that they've never received themselves because they're not sinners.

The many-sided wisdom of God. How God could be so wise as to be just and yet merciful to both condemn sin and at the same time save the sinner.

It's a marvelous thing and how that must annoy the realms of darkness. How that must frustrate and cause them rage and anguish every time they see a manifestation of the saving power of God.

The incredible wisdom of God that has sort of overwhelmed all obstacles in order to save a people for himself. It's a wonderful thought isn't it?

[10:58] And the church is the vehicle for displaying this. It is because the church is so precious to God because it is the acme it is the height it is the superlative recreating work of God in his world that it is the supreme target of the devil's attack.

Not a theoretical or a virtual church but a church like this one and others like us. Large, small, individual churches all together making up the church of Jesus Christ and as any church takes seriously the calling to be the body of Christ and the temple building of the Holy Spirit and so becomes more and more exactly what God wants us to be so the devil will rage more and more against such a church because such a church is bringing great glory to God.

It's displaying and showing the glory of God to the world. One further verse two verses Ephesians 1 verses 22 and 23 God placed all things under his feet under the feet of Jesus and appointed him to be head over everything for the church which is his body the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

So this is the reward that is given to Jesus Christ for his willingness to come to earth for his total obedience to go through a life sinlessly to endure the agony and God's separation that the cross entailed and God his father has vindicated Jesus Christ set him in the highest place with a very deliberate purpose that all things should be put under his feet that he should rule in every way and that his people the church should be nourished and cherished and brought safely to himself forever. That's our calling, that's what God has so blessed us with what a privileged people we are to find ourselves amazingly at the very heart of the things that are closest to the heart of God.

[13:46] So we need to reread these verses about conflict as us rather than just me because as much as the devil is interested in you personally and would like to pick you off one by one he is extremely interested in the church of Jesus Christ and extremely interested in this church and if he could wreck a church then a great victory has been won.

So last week we had the picture of the Roman soldier on the screen but really this passage should have had a cohort of soldiers because that's the picture that the apostle is giving to us.

We are an army. We are a body of people. We are the church of Jesus Christ all in plural. But I have to say this is a very hard idea for us to grasp.

It's a very hard idea for us to sustain, because we do live in a very individualistic society. In the western world, in Britain today, individualism rules.

I would even go so far as to say there's never been a time in human history and certainly the time of the church of Jesus Christ when people have lived in such individualistic ways.

[15:24] And whereby it is so hard for us to be able to read these passages in plural language. And sometimes we've been guilty as preachers of that truth as well.

Of encouraging such individualism that we forget the grand purpose of God. Which is not just to bring you individually to himself, but to bring a people to himself.

A people who are brothers and sisters in the Lord. Our instinct is self and it's not community.

So the Bible picture is foreign to us. It's so foreign to us that nothing but a change in our mindset is going to make a difference. We live and breathe in a world that exalts individualism.

The ego. The personality. So how are we going to be different? How are we going to grasp the Bible picture? We need a change of mind.

[16:36] But isn't that exactly what the Apostle Paul encourages us as a result of the gospel? It says in the view of God's mercies offer yourselves as living sacrifices.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed. How are we going to be transformed? How are we going to be different? Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

By the renewing of your mind. Romans 12 verse 2. this is the only way we're going to be transformed. I can't encourage you enough unless your mind is changed.

Unless you have a different mindset. Unless you're prepared to take a Christian mindset on and say I am not going to follow what this world is telling me. I'm going to follow the Bible.

Follow what he says. And please God give me strength to do that. I'm going to have to think about my life differently.

[17:53] My mind is going to have to be changed. Thank God he can do that. Thank God he does do that. And that's what we're about as a people.

Individualism is rampant in the church in the United Kingdom. Hardly a week goes by without having a conversation about a personal situation of somebody who says I don't need to go to church to be a Christian.

Let alone I don't need to be part of a church to be a Christian. I don't need to go to church to be a Christian. Way down one end of a spectrum in a tiny tiny sort of way I can say in a very small voice you're right.

You don't become a Christian by coming to church. You're right but the evidence of you being a Christian is that you are a part of the body of Jesus Christ.

That you are a part of the church. In some cases these people are very well taught but it seems to me on the basis of Bible evidence that they just are living in a blind spot.

[19:19] And you'll all know people like that. And in fact you may have been tempted to be like that yourself. self. Now, don't you think that that might be part of the devil's tactic?

To take hold of Christian people and say don't worry about church. Well that would achieve his end gloriously wouldn't it? If we all voted with our feet today and we decided next Sunday we won't be here, well there wouldn't be much of a church to be attacked would there.

There wouldn't be much going on on a Sunday morning here if we all one by one decided we weren't going to be here. So, I would suggest to you that this is the thinking of the world but surely it's the Satan's activity as well behind it which is encouraging people to think in that kind of a way. People I would suggest who should know better and we need to encourage each other in this as well. Now there is a kind of a compromise solution which fits very well with the thinking of the world and I wish I did have a screen now because I had some great pictures to show you of the compromise solution and the first compromise solution picture yourself on a tube train in London. How many of you have actually been on a tube train underground train in London? Right okay you know the thing don't you? I've got a great picture and it's got all these people. Yeah they're all squashed close to each other.

[21:01] You couldn't get people closer together. That's what I call shared experience. It's shared experience but I wish the others weren't there.

Okay? I wish the others weren't there. Football match. Great picture of a football match.

They're all waving the banners and so on. Crammed together. 50,000 people. Fantastic. The atmosphere is fantastic. That's what I call shared experience.

Shared experience is I'm enjoying this hugely. My team is winning. The referee is useless. But the person next to me I've got no idea what they're thinking.

I didn't know about their lives. I've got no relationship with them. I just happen to be geographically next to them. Third slide.

[22:10] Festival. Count me out. I know nothing about these things. You know about these things. Grand stage. Grand stage. Everybody taken up with what they're seeing on that stage.

But it's the same thing. It's a shared experience. But do you know the person you hug a mug with next door?

You're together but your experience is personal. individual. You're not bothered what others are going through. You will leave that moment and you will have no contact with those people again. You've just bumped into them in the course of a part of your life. Now there are Christian gatherings which can be just like that.

Especially when the numbers are large and you can get lost in the crowd. And I just want to warn you. Please don't equate belonging to a church with something which is akin to being in a large group of people looking at something which is happening at the front.

[23:30] It's a compromised solution. Christian togetherness means.

I would suggest it's mutually involved experience. Mutually involved. We are together as Paul himself says in Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 19 to 23.

We are a building. We are being built together on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone.

It's an organic building because it is being raised stone by stone. It isn't yet complete. Unfinished business. Just as Paul himself says in Ephesians chapter 5 verses 29 and 30.

We are a body. After all no one ever hated his own body but he feeds and cares for it just as Christ does the church for we are members of his body.

[24:47] Christ is the head and we are members of his body and he speaks in larger language in Corinthians about the intimate relationship of the members of the body to one another.

In such a church if you suffer I suffer. If you rejoice I rejoice. If I'm cast down you hold me up.

I'm here for you and you are here for me. it's an attitude and so we read Philippians chapter 2 19 to 30 earlier and I want you to notice the language there which is very strong, very striking.

It's beautiful to see the pictures of these two men Timothy and Epaphroditus. What a sensitivity is going on in these two men's lives. just think about Epaphroditus.

This man apparently it says of him that he risked his life for the sake of the apostle Paul in order in some way to represent the help that could be brought from the Philippian church who were absent from Paul geographically.

[26:04] They sent Epaphroditus, they spared him. Epaphroditus, go and encourage Paul. How much did it cost? It almost cost him his life. He says he was ill.

And then he was distressed, not just because he was ill, but he was distressed because they were distressed. He was upset because the Philippians were as upset about his illness.

That's how close it was. Paul says, I think I've had enough. You know, you spared him enough.

I've got to send him back. I've got to send him back. I feel for you. You've lost out, this good man.

Now think about Timothy, Paul's son in the faith.

And I want you to notice what he says about this man, Timothy. He says in verse 20, I've no one else like him who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

[27:11] and I've been struck by that verse again and again and I think, isn't that interesting? This is the New Testament time. This must be the glory days of the church.

These are the days when people did live in community, but presumably not. Paul says, I look around and I can't find many people like Timothy.

There are actually not many people, most people, and he's talking about Christian people here, church people. He says, most of them, they're looking up for their own interests. Strong language, isn't it?

Self-absorbed. Timothy, well, he's a one-off. Gold. Beautiful man. He takes a genuine interest in your welfare.

Gets up in the morning and he's praying for you. He's thinking, how can I bless somebody? How can I encourage that person?

[28:19] The Lord's telling me that that person's really in need of something. And that's what he's thinking about. I don't think that's about ignoring our own needs and situations, but it's just having the bigger vision, the church vision, that says, this is not about me, this is about us.

I would love to have hundreds of Timothys in this church. I think we do have Timothys in this church.

I think we do have Epaphroditus's in this church. But here's a spiritual ambition. Why not you? Why couldn't it be said of you, I've got no one like her who cares for others in the way that she does.

Why not? What's so different about you that you shouldn't have that label as well? Isn't that the calling that we've all received?

Happy the church where there are people like these two. Together, together. together. And so I come back to the passage in Ephesians and say, we fight together.

[29:33] We fight together. I've been reminding you of the 200th anniversary this year of the Battle of Waterloo, 18th of June, 1815.

An awesome battle involving a quarter of a million people. 50,000 people were killed or seriously wounded in that one day of battling. What a terrible, frightening thing that was.

And, of course, there weren't cameras at the time. But people lived that experience and they were able to tell about it afterwards. And I have a picture of the disposition of all the forces at the beginning, about 11 o'clock on the morning of the 18th of June.

The Allied Army and the French Army. And there are little colored blobs all over the place. Each one, distinctive regiments, each one with their own commanders, all set out, all ready for the battle. It seems to me that's a picture of the Church of Jesus Christ. We are all individual regiments in the Army of the Lord. And we're all fighting a battle.

[30:56] It was about that time that the British got to understand that the best way to actually defend their troops was to have a particular tactic which was known then as the British Square.

And the way it worked was this, or rather the problem was this. If the enemy forces had a competent cavalry, you have a massive horse charging towards you, a man with a saber. If you are there on that battlefield by yourself, you have no chance at all. Carnage. Carnage was caused in the earlier years, in the latter part of the 18th century, battle after battle, where individual soldiers were just picked off, and the result was death on a massive scale.

And the British commanders got together, they decided they had to fight against this. How would they combat it? And the idea that came up was the idea of the British Square.

So think of a hundred people. Think of this group. If we were to rearrange ourselves into a square, facing outwards, this is exactly what they did.

[32:14] Three rows of people, all close together. The first knelt on the ground, bayonets like that. Long bayonets coming out of their rifles. The second was behind, with their guns.

The third row was also with their guns. When one row was reloading, the other row was firing. The bayonets prevented the horses. And they were together in a close-knit team.

And they were a square. So as the horses came towards them and they charged to the left and the right, on the left-hand side, there was the square. Round the back, there was a square. On the right, there was a square.

It transformed the performance of the troops in battle. because they were together, everybody knew his role. They were a unit. They were a team.

That was fundamental to the victory at Waterloo. It's fundamental to the victory of the armies of Jesus Christ that we should work together as a unit.

[33:17] Not individuals. Stick in the square. get close to your brother and sister. What a camaraderie and fellowship and friendship comes out of fighting together.

Some of you may have had fathers who first fought in the first war or secondly in the second. And it was said of those people when they came back from the battlefield, they couldn't talk about it.

They couldn't talk about their experiences in wartime, especially those who were involved in the conflicts in the Far East where they'd seen terrible things which seemed so foreign to life over here. But another reason why they couldn't talk about it is because they had such intense experience of camaraderie and friendship together that there was nothing that was equivalent in their day-to-day lives now.

There was nothing like going through trials together. You know, think saving private Ryan or something similar of that ilk. That I will lay down my life for you attitude which seems so far, far away from the sort of lives that we live.

[34:52] And so it was that those men, they had the sort of the seminal heart experiences that were the most fundamental things of their whole lives.

And nothing matched it in after life for them. Nothing equivalent to it. Living life so intensely because you're that near to death.

Caring for one another so deeply. Putting yourself in the way of the bullet rather than your fellow brother. Well, some intensity there.

You know, I think it's something about that Peter refers to in 1 Peter 5 verses 8 and 9. Peter 5 verses 8 and 9.

Page 1221. So we've looked at this verse before, haven't we? We'd be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

[35:59] Resist him, standing firm in the faith. We got as far as that, but this is the encouragement that he gives to these believers. Because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

There's something about the fact that we're in this together that should be strong and encouraging enough to make us stand and resist the devil and say, I won't give in.

When I think about how my brothers and sisters are suffering in Syria at this time, why should I give in to the devil's temptations in comfortable, cozy UK?

What am I going through that others aren't going through in a greater measure? We're in it together. At Hebrews 13, verse 3, remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering.

So he's calling us to that intense relationship, isn't he? He's saying, I want you to picture yourself as if you're in prison. Together with other Christians, but together with the Lord Jesus.

[37:26] Together with the Lord Jesus. In the same book of Hebrews, which is a book of encouragement for people who were in the battle and about to give up and about to fall back.

They need encouragement. They need hope. They need a reason to carry on. And what is given to them in one word might be this, Jesus. I'm offering you Jesus.

Why would you turn your back on such a one as Jesus? And there's no book in the Bible which so eloquently speaks of Jesus as the one who has done so much for us and doing that by being with us and one of us.

So if you turn to Hebrews 2 and allow the words of God to speak to your heart here, both, verse 11, both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family.

So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, I will declare your name to my brothers in the presence of the congregation.

[38:39] I will sing your praises. I will put my trust in him. And again he says, here am I and the children God has given me. Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is the devil.

It's rich language. And he ends that particular chapter by saying, because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. It's the same idea.

It's sympathy. It's closeness. It's the fact that Jesus has gone before. He is the pioneer. He is the one who has experienced everything that we have to go through and has emerged triumphant.

And so it says of him as the high priest in chapter 4, verse 15, we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are.

It was without sin. And it was Jesus who had to fight a battle. Chapter 5, verse 7. During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death.

[39:55] And he was heard because of his reverent submission. He has patterned for us the life that we need to live. He is the supreme soldier.

He is the one who has fought the fight. And it's to him that we may look. Time after time, after the battle of Waterloo, people remarked on the fact that the Duke of Wellington was riding on his horse Copenhagen in the battle.

He was, unlike some commanders, not away with the baggage somewhere else, receiving messages from different parts of the battlefield. But it said of him that wherever the fight was fiercest, he was there.

And his troops could see him. And they had such respect for him because he was such a commander. He was a soldier. That was the one thing he did well in his life.

He never did anything better than what he did in his soldiering. He knew what they were going through. He knew what a command meant because he'd been there himself.

[41:12] And I say we have a supreme commander in Jesus Christ. One to whom we may look, as Hebrews encourages us to do so. Looking unto Jesus,

the author, the finisher of our faith.

Who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and is now set down at the right hand of God. He's our inspiration, isn't he?

That's what the Bible encourages us to do. Jesus is not one who just says, do it. He's done it. He's been there. He led by example.

Don't we see an echo of all that in Revelation chapter 19, verses 11 to 16. I saw heaven standing open, and there before me was a white horse whose rider is called, faithful and true.

With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself, dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the word of God.

[42:26] The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses, and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. On his robe and on his thigh, he has this name written, King of Kings, Lord of Lords.

That's the one we're looking to. The one who has gloriously triumphed. So I close with this thought. Whose side are you on? Are you in the army of Jesus Christ? Is he your example, in your inspiration, and your leader?

And I want to say to you firstly, there are no spectators in this war, no bystanders, no undecideds, no don't knows.

At the Battle of Waterloo, there was nobody on the sidelines. They were all in a conflict together. And so it is today.

[43:40] You cannot be on the sidelines. This is not a matter for someone else. It's for you. The question is, whose side are you on?

Are you fighting with Jesus, or against him? Jesus himself says this. He who is not for us, is against us.

The Bible knows of only two groups, those who are with the Lord, and those who are against him. And Paul describes, one of these groups, very eloquently, in Ephesians chapter 2, verses 1 to 3. A group of people. As for you, you were dead in your transgressions, and sins in which you used to live, when you followed the ways of this world, and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work, in those who are disobedient.

It's the devil. If we're not following Jesus Christ, we're actually under the constraints, and the pressure, and the direction of the devil.

[45:10] All of us who lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature, and following its desires and thoughts, like the rest, we were by nature, objects of wrath.

It's dark, and it's depressing language, isn't it? It's the language of death and destruction. To not be a Christian, is to find yourself in the place of judgment, an object of wrath.

You're facing the wrong way. But there's a but. It doesn't have to be like that.

Even now, however hard you may have fought against the rule and reign of Jesus Christ, Jesus is saying, stop. Why will you die?

Stop fighting me. Come to me. Acknowledge me. See your need. Stop your foolishness. Take me to be your Lord and Savior.

[46:19] And if you now stop and turn and submit, God will lovingly and immediately, and without any penalty or recriminations, fully receive you.

Join the side where victory, a hope, and a future is utterly secure. It's a fight.

It's difficult. It's dangerous. But it's a good fight. It's a worthwhile fight. It's a fight which ends in victory. It's a fight with great rewards.

It's a victory is sure fight. We have the presence and the promise of Jesus who said, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. As the hymn writer says, it were a well-spent journey those seven deaths lay between.

Who is on the Lord's side? Who will serve the king? Will you?

[47:30] Is that where you want to be? Is that where you are? That's what we're going to sing. Make this your prayer. Who is on the Lord's side?

Who will serve the king? Who will serve the king?