

Life is both a Battle and a Blessing

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[0 : 01] Well, here we are. We're at home. Boris himself has said that's where we've got to be. We've got to stay at home. We've got to work from home. We're not to go visiting others. We're only to go out when it's absolutely necessary to get those essential supplies.

And people have not been slow to share their experiences of this online. My favourite is the guy who said that, for the first time in a while, I find myself spending more quality time with my wife. We're starting to talk more. I had no idea she'd packed in her job in Woolworths. OK, let's be serious for a minute. The virus itself, like any sickness, is horrific.

And the damage it's causing, the wider damage, is too terrible to even begin to put into words. So please don't think that what I'm about to say in any way underestimates any of that. But what I want us to think about over these next few minutes is how, in the midst of everything else that's going on, we might be able to discern some of the good stuff.

[1 : 11] And yet, I actually did say that. The good stuff. The Bible helps us to understand that life is both a battle and a blessing. Always.

Now, sometimes we'll be more aware of one of those things than the other. If we're in a period of blessing, it can seem like everything is just amazing. Now, this week, the sun's been shining. That's fantastic.

And as we enter British summertime, we get those longer evenings. That's even more fantastic. But when we're in the midst of summer, or at least a hot one, those memories of a cold, dark winter with short days can seem like a very, very distant reality.

Spiritually, when we're experiencing God's blessing, it's important that we don't let our guard down. We need to remember that a battle is going on.

We need to be battle ready. That's why, in Ephesians 6, Paul tells us to put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

[2 : 24] For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

So, Paul says that we're to put on the armour of God. Notice Paul doesn't say anything about taking it off. We're never to relax our guard.

We need to stay spiritually awake. We need to be battle ready. Always. But that's not the point I want to emphasise right now.

Because my guess is that, at this point in time, the greater challenge is not so much trying to remember that we're in the midst of a battle, but rather catching sight of some of the blessing. Just when the battle can seem overwhelming, I want to call us to see beyond the objects of our fears and anxieties, to recognise some of the blessing that is very, very real.

[3 : 31] When we look at Mark chapter 1, and I encourage you to go off and read the whole chapter, it's not long. When we look at Mark chapter 1, we see this dynamic of battle and blessing going on in and around the life of ministry of Jesus.

Now, a feature of Mark's gospel is the way in which it moves quite quickly. For example, whereas Matthew and Luke give more detailed description of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, Mark gives us only a brief summary, and then he moves on.

So in one single chapter, we see the blessing of Jesus' baptism, and the battle of his temptation. We see the blessing of his disciples dropping everything to follow him.

And then as we encounter his healing, deliverance, and preaching of the good news, we see lives blessed as Jesus goes to war against sickness, oppression, and the dark powers of this world.

Battle and blessing. Sometimes it can feel like those things come in a sort of sequenced order in our lives.

[4 : 46] You know, we've got a period of blessing, and then we go through a period of battle, and then blessing, and then battle, and then more blessing, and then more battle, like some kind of alternating succession of ups and downs.

But I think the reality is that if we look closely, both are always there in any given moment. It's a double track that runs right through life.

It's just that we don't always see it. The Bible gives us plenty of examples. As the people of Israel fled the Egyptian army, their situation had every appearance of a battle, and it was precisely that. But as they made their way to freedom through the parted waters of the Red Sea, it was simultaneously a blessing. Mary and Joseph were told by an angel to flee the brutal massacre wrought by Herod.

Battle. Yet through it all, they were raising and nurturing the infant Jesus who had been placed in their care for the salvation of the world.

[5 : 54] Blessing. As Peter got out of the boat, he could see the wind and waves threatening to engulf him. Battle.

Yet as he set his gaze on Jesus, he made his way across the surface of the water into his Saviour's arms. Blessing.

We're in a battle at this time. Let's make no mistake. But let's not lose sight of the blessings. For example, as countries go into lockdown over the virus, there have been significant drops in pollution levels.

As we use our cars less and flights are cancelled en masse, there are recordings all over the world of radically major falls in both nitrogen dioxide and carbon monoxide.

As people go into isolation, stories abound of folk putting notes through the doors of others in their street, offering help and support with shopping.

[6 : 59] People connecting with fellow neighbours who they may have seen out and about, but have never really spoken with or got to know before now. And of course, we're starting to appreciate basic things again.

Having food. Having the most simple things. I mean, who would have believed that we'd ever pay attention to and be thankful for the amount of toilet roll that we're able to access?

Life's a battle, yeah. Especially right now. But let's not lose sight of the blessing. There's two tracks, and we need to be aware of both.

Remember, there's always more than one way of looking at things. Like the guy in the pizza restaurant who was asked by the waiter if he wanted his pizza cut into six slices or four.

He said, oh, you'd better make it four. I don't think I could manage six. Yeah, there are different ways of viewing the same reality. And my call out to all of us over these coming days, is to be on the lookout for the blessings.

[8 : 12] Because they are there. And we need to know that they're there. Sure, let's always be battle ready. But perhaps it's time to rediscover the forgotten art of being blessing ready.

And as you do so this week, may God bless you. Loads. Kill this. Kill this. Do you? Yeah. Whip. Zheng this. Music is a giants. Jahwe. Son, government. They're soccerers. Look at all. Oh, you don't know, covetous. In the end gate process tonight we'll lose purpose. They ate a hug. And you do try again. The girls play it so that the captain can always make a loss.

So'd that be why Jon still has it. if, I think that it's the whole idea. That's not a good idea. The lady's playing edge is■■■■■■ today. And the owner takes focus into that role.