

Stand Firm

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[0 : 00] There is this really interesting account in 2 Kings 6. The king of Assyria is seeking to attack Israel.

And so he surrounded himself with a war council and they make decisions of when and where to attack Israel. But what the king of Assyria didn't know is that God was supplying the information to the prophet Elijah.

And Elijah would tell the king of Israel where he was going to attack. And so the king of Israel always had a defense ready. And so the king of Syria brings his war council together and he says, which one of you is a traitor?

What's going on here? And his war council says to him, it's the prophet Elijah. He's letting the king of Israel know everything you're doing.

And so the king of Syria says, well, go get him. Where is he? He's in the city of Dothan. Go get him.

And so the king of Syria sends an army down to Dothan where Elijah is residing with his servant.

[1 : 10] And that evening they surround the city. The next morning they wake up. Elijah's servant walks out and he is dismayed because the city of Dothan is surrounded by chariots and horses of the Syrian empire.

And do you know what Elijah says to him? He says, don't be afraid. Don't freak out! Don't freak out! There are more numbered with us than with them.

And then Elijah prays, O Lord, open the eyes of this servant so that he may see.

And do you know what? God opened his eyes. And do you know what he saw? Do you know what?

The angelic host of God. Surrounding them on the hillside. Surrounding Elijah in chariots of fire.

And then Elijah prayed and they were delivered. The reason why I bring this account up is this.

We're at the front step of Ephesians 6.

[2 : 26] This section on spiritual battle. And my prayer for you is that God would open your eyes through His Word. That we would be made aware of the spiritual realities and the spiritual conflict that surrounds us.

So having said that, let's pray one more time as we open God's Word. O Lord, please open our eyes that we may see that we are in the midst of a spiritual war and we are fighting forces that are greater than us.

But not so for you, Lord Jesus. O God, strengthen us this morning with your mighty strength that we may stand firm.

And having done all, stand firm. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.

Ephesians 6. I'm going to read through Ephesians 6. Just a few verses here. 10-13. Would you please read along with me if you can?

[3 : 45] Otherwise, hear God's Word. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Therefore, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all, to stand firm.

That initial moment that you first heard and believed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, there was a dramatic shift of kingdom allegiance.

Colossians 1.13 says it this way, God delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son. And brothers and sisters, this morning, what you need to understand is that this isn't metaphoric language.

[5 : 01] This is the Apostle Paul speaking of a real spiritual conflict. A real spiritual reality.

Each of us, if you're in Christ, has been transferred from one kingdom to another. We've been pulled out of one and placed into another.

And the prince of darkness who we once followed Ephesians 2, he's not pleased. This morning, what you must see through God's Word and be sobered by is that as Christians, we are at war.

There is a battle raging. There's a conflict happening. We're in the midst of it. We are under imminent threat of spiritual attack by forces greater than us, but not greater than our God.

In fact, what we're going to see here is that God has provided spiritual enablement, strength for us that we may stand firm against our enemy.

[6 : 14] Or as 1 Peter says, to resist Him. For the next four Sundays, we're going to learn about spiritual warfare from this section in Ephesians 6.

And this morning, I want you to think of it as a battle briefing. Next Sunday, we're going to analyze the biblical recon on our enemy.

On the 17th, it's to the armory we go. We're just going to walk through the spiritual armor. We'll take stock of the essential, vital equipment God has provided each of us, has issued each of us, so that we understand what it is, how it works, and how we put it in play.

We're just not to strap it on to look good. We're strapping it on to war. And then finally, on the 24th, we're going to see the vital role of prayer in this spiritual battle to advance the mission our King has called us to, to make known His great name among the nations.

We're at war. And we fight against an unseen, powerful, indetermined enemy. So this morning, for the remainder of our time, we've got a battle briefing.

[7 : 42] And we're going to walk through Ephesians 6, 10 through 13, and there's a real clear logic of the Apostle Paul here. And so we're going to look at what we need to do, be strengthened. We're going to look at how we are to do that, put on the armor, and then we're going to look at why we must do this.

We've got an enemy. And then the so what? Stand firm. It actually will follow Paul's logic in this passage.

But this morning, my prayer for you has been is to realize that we are in fact at war. So point number one, what we are told we must do.

If you look at Ephesians 6, 10, we see it. Finally, be strong in the Lord in the strength of His might.

What we're being told to here, commanded to do, is to be strengthened by God.

Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. So right out of the gate, we've got to realize that it's only by God's strength that we will be able to stand against our enemy.

[8 : 53] In other words, we will be unable to stand against the spiritual forces of darkness in our own strength. in and of ourselves, we are outgunned by the devil.

Which leads me to something glorious. Do you realize what kind of strength Paul has in mind here?

That phrase, the strength of His might, you see that?

Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. This isn't the first time that phrase has showed up in the book of Ephesians. If you flip back to Ephesians 1, verse 19.

Now, just to jog your memories a little bit, Paul has been praying for the Ephesians that God would open the eyes of their heart, that they would realize some glorious truths that are true of them in Christ Jesus.

And he says in verse 19, and he prays that they would understand what is the immeasurable greatness of His power towards us who believe. And here's the phrase, according to the working of His great might.

[10 : 04] You could translate it, the strength of His might. It's the same words. Do you know what it's in reference to? God's great immeasurable strength that He put on display when He raised Jesus Christ from the dead, seated Him in heaven, and then put all things under His feet.

that's the strength. That's the power He's talking about here. It's not some kind of vague power, but a real power. It's a power that has rendered the devil and his demons of no authority.

He's disarmed them. Now, this power is of immeasurable greatness, and it's exercised for our good in the putting of all things under the feet of Christ.

So what you need to see here is that we are to be strengthened by the same power that has dominated the spiritual forces of evil. God has already subjugated our foe.

our strength is from the Lord, not ourselves. We must be constantly strengthened by His power that has already been put on display through His cross and resurrection.

[11:29] So that's the power. That's where we find our strength. That's some awesome power, isn't it? Now the question becomes, how? How do we appropriate that kind of power?

How does that power get to us in such a way that we are to be enabled by it? Well, we're told here in verse 11, we read this.

Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand. Here's God's strength and the way that we bring it to bear in our own lives is by putting on the armor.

And in two weeks, we're going to get a close look at the armor. But here's what I want you to see this morning. The source of the armor is God Himself.

Notice verse 11, put on the whole armor of God. And then look at verse 13, therefore take up the whole armor of God.

[12:42] This armor is God forged armor. This armor is God fashioned armor. And this armor has a God enforcing function to enable Christians to stand against their formidable foe, the devil.

The devil. God uses means. And the way that we are strengthened with the Lord's strength is by strapping on this armor.

God's strength for us. Which leads me to the next point. The intended effect of this armor is to strengthen us. God is the source of this armor and He gives it to us in order to resource us for the battle at hand.

This armor of God amazingly strengthens saints with the power that raised Christ from the dead. The power that's already subjugated our foes.

So with this armor on, a Christian poses a kind of a threat to the spiritual forces of evil. Which means this, if you don't have the armor on, you are rendered powerless and vulnerable to a desperate, dangerous, and determined enemy, the devil.

[14:15] So up until this point, we've looked at the what. We are to be strengthened in the Lord with the strength of His might. And then we're just being told how. we're strengthened by putting on the whole armor of God.

We'll come back to that in a couple weeks. But I want you to see why. We are told why we need God's strengthening armor.

To stand firm against the schemes of the devil. Several things you know about the devil. This is a battle briefing.

I'm not going to go into great depth. I'm going to come back to this next week so we can have a greater understanding of some of his scheming. But for today, know this, the devil is real.

Paul is writing of the same being that deceived Adam and Eve in the garden and that will one day war against the returning Christ. Jesus himself was tempted by the devil in Matthew chapter 4.

[15:18] Do you remember that? And in Matthew 4, just as a side note, the second Adam, Jesus, did what the first Adam didn't do.

And that was obey God's word and send the devil packing. The second Adam did what the first Adam didn't do and in so doing he undid what the first Adam did.

He did. for us. So the devil is real. The devil opposes God.

Look at verses 11 and 12. And if you're looking in the ESV, you're going to notice a repeated word.

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

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places, against, against, against.

[16:28] The devil opposes the work of God. Ephesians 1.9 informs us that God has a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Christ.

To unite all things in Christ. So what the devil is seeking to do is to oppose God's redemptive work to unite all things in Christ for the glory of Christ.

But what the devil really does not want you to know is this, that God in His glorious sovereignty uses the schemes of the devil to advance His plan for the fullness of time.

God works all things out for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose, even the schemes of the devil. That's the scope of God's sovereignty. The devil is not God's equal.

In fact, though the devil would not care to admit this either, he's actually dependent on God and subservient to Him. He was created by God.

[17 : 42] He's been around for a while. He took the form of a crafty serpent in the garden and deceived Adam and Eve. He's been around for a while, but you know what? Don't think he's from everlasting to everlasting.

That's God alone. The devil was created. The devil isn't stupid. Throughout the millennia, the devil has been opposing God's eternal plan of salvation, so he's picked up some best practices along the way.

He's very cunning. He may even have a top ten ways to deceive and distract God's people. The devil is cunning, but he's not omniscient.

Only our God knows all. The devil is organized. You can see that played out in 6.12 where we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil.

He's talking about the demonic host. He doesn't go into explaining how they're organized, just that there are a lot of them with seemingly different titles.

[19 : 03] The devil may be organized, but he's not omnipresent. Only God is omnipresent, our God, and our God has promised to be with us always, strengthening us.

The devil is powerful. Ephesians 6.12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. Our fight isn't mano y mano.

We're not fighting the same kinds of people as we would ourselves. Our fight is against something in the spiritual places in the heavenlies. against rulers, against authorities, against cosmic powers, spiritual forces.

We may be outgunned, but our God is not. His power prevails against the cosmic powers over this present darkness. Remember Ephesians 1.22.

He has already set all things under the feet of Christ. So the devil is more powerful than any of us, but he's not more powerful than our God.

[20 : 17] The cross of Christ, this is Colossians 2.15, has disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them. The power of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has triumphed over the devil.

Christ's cross defeated sin, defeated death, and has defeated the devil. So the devil's already been defeated.

He knows it. So for those of us in Christ, because we've been moved from one kingdom to another, the devil has absolutely no authority over us.

Ephesians 2.6, Paul is very explicit. We have been seated with Christ in the heavenly places, far above these authorities.

Do you remember when the United States invaded Iraq? He toppled Saddam Hussein. Remember that? We established, the United States established a stable government there, but there was a time when Saddam Hussein, though toppled, was on the run.

[21 : 33] He was alive and he was exerting influence. That's where we're living right now. The cross has toppled the devil, but he is present and exerting influence.

He's been defeated. He's been defeated by our King, Christ. The devil's doom has been determined. Would you look back at Revelation?

You've got to see this in your Bible. Because our enemy knows this is in our Bible too. Revelation chapter 20 verse 10. Christ comes back.

He cleans house. So here's something to bank on that we were singing of just moments ago. Thank you Martin Luther.

Revelation 20 verse 19. Excuse me, 10. 20 verse 10. And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

[22 : 49] His doom is sure. But it makes them all the more dangerous. Though defeated, he's dangerous.

Peter in 1 Peter 5 8 describes him as a prowling lion seeking for someone to devour. Though he has no authority over us, he can still assault us especially if we go unarmed.

he is determined. He's determined to wreak havoc on anyone but especially the saints of God, those of us who have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness following the prince of the power of the air, transferred into the kingdom of the beloved son.

It's safe to say he hates us. our battle is against a defeated foe whose demise is sure, but it's made him all the more desperate, dangerous, and determined.

Our enemy is not flesh and blood. So we need God's strength to stand against his raging. C.S.

[24 : 12] Lewis wrote this book, The Screwtape Letters. If you haven't read this, read it. But in the preface, he writes this.

There are two equal and opposite errors in which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence, disregard them, the other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them, to be enamored by them.

We are being called to soberly stand firm against them. So we've looked at the what?

Be strengthened in the Lord. We looked at the how? By putting on God's armor. We looked at the why. We have a defeated but dangerous foe. Now let's look at the so what.

We are exhorted to stand firm. And we see that in Ephesians 6, 11, 13, and 14. But let me just let you know this.

[25 : 24] We live in between the defeat of the devil through Christ's death and resurrection and the final demise of the devil when he gets thrown into the lake of fire.

So we live in the already but not yet. We live in between. So our enemy continues to prowl though defeated.

Defanged as some say. But he still exerts influence. When Jesus returns and he tosses the devil into the lake of fire, do you know what?

We don't need the armor anymore. There will be no need to suit up. Maybe our heavenly mansions will have display cases for armor. But we live in a time, this present darkness, verse 12.

In the evil day, verse 13, when we must take up the armor so that we can stand firm against the devil.

[26 : 28] There remains a threat by a dangerous though defeated foe. God enables us to stand against the spiritual forces in his strength.

We are strengthened with God's strength through putting on the armor. That enables us to withstand the attacks of the devil. Notice that word stand.

We see that in verse 11. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. Verse 13, take up the whole armor.

That purpose you may be able to withstand in the evil day. And having done all to stand firm. Look at 14, the first word, stand therefore.

Now up until this point in Ephesians, God has been exhorting us to walk. We were dead and used to walk in trespasses and sins. Two, one. Now we've been made alive in Christ Jesus and we walk in the good works that he has prepared beforehand for us.

[27 : 35] 2.10. We are to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called. 4.1.

We must no longer walk as non-Christians do in the futility of their minds. 4.17. We are to walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

5.2. We are to walk as children of light, finding out what pleases our God and exposing the unfruitful deeds of darkness. 5.8-11. We are to walk not as unwise but as wise, making the most of the time because the days are evil.

5.15. Empowered by the Spirit, submitting to one another. Walk, walk, walk, walk. Walkity, walkity, walkity, walkity, walk. Walk, walk, walk. Ephesians is just packed full with exhortations to walk.

Walk, walk, walk, walk, walk. Walk. 6.11. Stand. Stand. Walk, walk, walk. Stand. Stand firm.

It's a change of posture. It's climactic. There's a reason why Paul is closing the letter on this note.

[28 : 47] In the midst of all these glorious calls to holiness, to walk as Christ would have us, to walk in the ways of Christ, Paul sobers us up by exhorting us to stand firm against the devil.

Up until this point, walk like Christ. Now we are to stand in the strength he provides. This fight is close quarter combat.

That word wrestle, in verse 12, for we do not wrestle. That's literally to lock somebody up. Close quarter combat.

It's exerting an effort. It's being close proximity to things. And we are called here to persevere by God's strength, having done all to stand firm.

And so here's where he wraps it up. You need to be strengthened. Put on the armor. We've got a really strong foe. So put on the armor and stand firm. Fight.

[30 : 01] Wrestle. Resist him with the strength that God has provided for you. Until Jesus comes back and tosses him into the lake. There's something I just want to note before I close.

He's writing to a church. It's easy to think about putting on the armor and standing firm in terms of individualistic thinking.

But he's writing to a church. We are to stand firm together. against the schemes of the devil. Each of us is to suit up daily with the empowering armor of God so that we can stand together united against the schemes of the devil.

Imagine. Look around. We've got everybody wearing their civvies. Dressed for the day. Now imagine all of us clad in the armor of God.

Singing God's praises from the depths of our hearts in the midst of a raging battle. We're to do this together.

[31 : 19] What? Be strong in the Lord. How? Put on the armor. Why? Our enemy is real and powerful, defeated yet dangerous. So we must stand firm together against our enemy.

One point of application. When the U.S. was drawn into World War II, the U.S. industry was dramatically transformed in a really short amount of time.

It went from peace time to war time really quick. So auto plants became tank plants. Manufacturers of blue denim started producing green camo outfits.

Luxury liners became troop transports. The war united our country. It's a testament to those who've gone before us, both our citizens and our leaders.

Real war has a real effect. Real war really transforms a people's thinking and way of living. And so in light of the real spiritual battle that we are in right now, do you have a wartime mentality?

[32 : 38] Are you thinking battle? Are you thinking skirmish? Are you thinking and are you living? Are you taking up the armor and light of the spiritual fight at hand?

We will unpack this in the next few weeks. But I just wanted to ask, is it in your mind? Let's pray. Oh Lord, open our eyes that we may think and live empowered with your strength against the spiritual forces of this present darkness.

God, would you keep us from disregarding the spiritual realities and keep us from becoming enamored with them? God, would you help us to be sober and to stand firm with the strength you provide?

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.