

## ...in the battle

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 19 May 2019

Preacher: Simon Dowdy

[ 0 : 00 ] For our transgressions are multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us. For our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities, transgressing and denying the Lord, and turning back from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words.

Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off. For truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.

The Lord saw it, and it displeased him, that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede.

Then his own arm brought him righteousness, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head.

He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, so will he repay. Wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies.

[ 1 : 16 ] To the coastlands he will render repayment. So they shall fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. For he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the Lord drives, and a redeemer will come to Zion.

To those in Jacob who turn from transgression, declares the Lord. Finally, be strong in the law. And in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour 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 over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

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

Stand, therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

[ 2 : 52 ] In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.

To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly, to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

So that you also may know how I am, and what I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will tell you everything. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ, with love incorruptible.

Now this is the last in our series of talks in Ephesians, and so my aim this morning is to do two things. Firstly, is to preach this passage, Ephesians 6, verses 10 to 24.

[ 4 : 20 ] But then secondly, I want to do so in such a way that actually summarises the whole letter for us. So I want to begin by asking a question, why is following Jesus so hard?

Think of tomorrow morning, think of yesterday, why is following Jesus so hard? At one level it sounds easy, doesn't it? So some of the things we've seen in Ephesians, Ephesians chapter 4, verse 15, for example, speak the truth in love to each other, and yet so often, rather than encouraging each other from God's word, we just find it so much easier to talk about other things.

Or 4.25, to put away falsehood. Or 4.29, to build up others. It's not rocket science, is it? And yet we find it so difficult in practice.

Or chapter 5, verse 25, husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church. Or chapter 6, verse 1, children obey your parents in the Lord. Or later on in chapter 6, why is being a Christian at work so difficult?

Well, from what we've seen in Ephesians so far, it's because the world looks big, and the church and the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ looks small.

[ 5 : 37 ] Remember, Ephesus as a city was dominated physically by the massive temple of Artemis. It was at the heart of the religious, social, cultural, political and economic life of the city.

For a Christian in first century Ephesus, you'd have felt very much on the edge. The world felt and looked very big indeed.

And so it's no surprise that one of the key verses of the letter is chapter 3, verse 13. Let me remind us of it. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I'm suffering for you, which is your glory.

And yet throughout this letter, the Apostle Paul doesn't say what perhaps we might be tempted to say, which is, don't worry, the world really isn't that big at all.

It's what I say to my children. So there's a cry of help from upstairs. Daddy, there's a spider in my room. Can you please deal with it? Which, for those who are not squeamish, means a little bit more than dealing with it.

[ 6 : 43 ] So I go upstairs and my response is generally to say, it's a tiny spider. Don't worry about it. It's small. But rather than saying that the non-Christian world is small and so don't worry about it, the Apostle Paul says, God's plan is so much bigger.

I take it it's why the letter opens with a statement of that plan. Chapter 1, verse 10, the verse we keep on coming back to.

God's plan in Christ for the fullness of time to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In other words, the point at which you and I are tempted to lose heart because the world looks big, Paul directs our attention instead to the plan of God, which is so much bigger, so much more significant.

And yet there's a second reason why the Christian life is so difficult, and that is the subject of today's passage, Ephesians chapter 6, and it is that every disciple of Jesus Christ lives in a war zone.

I don't know if that's how you think of your life if you're a follower of Jesus, but it's how you should think about your life if you're a follower of Jesus. You are living in a war zone. You'll find there are two headings on the back of the service sheets which you might be helpful to follow.

[ 8 : 13 ] First of all, preparing for the spiritual battle. Verses 10 to 12. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

Put on the full 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 over this present darkness, over the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. The battle is not against things we can see, but against the devil and against the evil spiritual powers of our universe. The devil, of course, is largely dismissed in our culture as being unreal and irrelevant, and no doubt that is something that he is very pleased about.

Indeed, I guess some of us, perhaps this whole language, as Clive read this passage for us, perhaps some of us found it just kind of so far removed from daily lives that actually we find it rather difficult to relate to.

And yes, Ephesians has shown us the very real ways in which the devil is at work. Turn back to chapter 2.

[ 9 : 33 ] This is how the Bible describes every individual, every person, before we have put our trust in Jesus.

Chapter 2, verses 1 and 2. And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air.

That's the devil. The spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. That is why he hates it when people turn from following him to following Jesus.

The second reference to the devil in Ephesians comes in chapter 4, verses 26 and 27. Be angry and do not sin.

Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil. Just think of that angry comment or harsh word to someone at church.

[10:43] What is going on? Well, behind the scenes, in terms of what we cannot see, is the invisible work of the devil, working hard to destroy the unity of the local church.

That is why the Christian life is so hard. That is why church is so hard. Satan does not want us to become part of the people of God.

And once we have responded to Jesus and begun to follow him, he doesn't want us to live like the people of God. And therefore, of course, it shouldn't surprise us at all that evangelism is so difficult. Nor should it surprise us that living as a church is so difficult. Where do we see the spiritual battle? Well, the devil hates every Christian conversation, every change of life, every renewed mind, every time a husband and wife pray together, every time a child obeys their parents, every time sexual temptation is resisted, every time a Christian demonstrates at work that Jesus Christ is Lord.

That is how we experience the spiritual battle. I wonder if you've seen, perhaps at the Imperial War Museum or something like that, one of those posters from the Second World War, and the capture simply goes.

[12:12] Don't you know there's a war on? The caption underneath the photograph. Don't you know there's a war on? And the background picture, perhaps someone going about their daily life, chatting to a neighbour, doing their job, or whatever it is.

And the point is, the point of the poster was simply to say, your life may be very ordinary. Your life may feel very ordinary indeed as you go about your daily life and interact with neighbours and so on.

But don't be deceived. There's a war on. It affects everything. It's just the same for the follower of Jesus, which means that if we're going to stand firm in the battle, then as we've seen throughout the letter, we need to look at the world not simply with the eyes in our heads, but with the eyes in our hearts.

Do you remember that prayer right at the beginning of the letter in chapter 1? Chapter 1, verses 17 and 18. As Paul prays for these Christians, chapter 1, verse 17, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and a revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you and so on.

It's the kind of thing, isn't it, that David Attenborough is so brilliant at doing. You know, his ability to open our eyes to a whole world which we simply didn't know existed.

[13:55] So, you know, the Blue Planet series, in the oceans with creatures and habitats that you simply would never have imagined in a million years were there. Or closer to me, a series on cities helping us to see what's going on all around us and yet we so rarely see it or even stop to think about it.

That is just what Paul is doing throughout this letter. And in particular, he wants us to understand what is going on in the heavenly places. I've put some verses on the outline.

In chapter 1, verse 3, Christians have been blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. In chapter 1, verse 20, Jesus has been raised from the dead and is seated at God's right hand in the heavenly places.

In chapter 2, verse 6, those who have believed in Jesus have been raised up with him and seated with him in the heavenly places. Finally, chapter 3, verse 10, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. The church, as people from all nations and cultures and backgrounds come under the rule of Jesus Christ, is a microcosm of the new creation.

[15:20] It shows that God's plan is on track. And the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places, as they see that, as they look at the church globally, as they look at the local church, they see that all too well.

And that is why the devil will do all he can to stop the church being church and to stop the church demonstrating by the way it lives and by the message it proclaims that Jesus Christ is Lord.

The news a couple of weeks ago that 240 million Christians globally are facing persecution should come as no surprise whatsoever if we take Ephesians chapter 6 seriously.

Well back to chapter 6 verse 12. 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.

Notice will you on the one hand there's no dualism in the Bible. The idea that God and the devil are somehow battling it out and you're never quite sure which one will win. That is complete nonsense. [16:42] You know as if sometimes Jesus gets the upper hand and sometimes the devil does. That is simply wrong because Jesus Christ is Lord. It's why demons cannot be, it's why Christians cannot be demon possessed.

You sometimes hear Christians talking about demon possession. Christians can't be demon possessed because they've already been raised with Christ to sit at his right hand.

And yet on the other hand we mustn't underestimate the nature of the battle. Because the fact is that in the nitty gritty of the Christian life it's all too easy to forget we are living in a war zone.

It's not surprising, it's hard. And that of course means that we cannot fight the battle on our own.

Verse 10, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

And yet because Jesus has defeated the devil on the cross because it was confirmed by his resurrection because his victory is now is now seen in the church across the world and on display in the church throughout the world.

[17:51] It's not a battle that you and I have to win. The battle has been won already. Did you notice that? We are simply to stand firm. Verse 11, that you may be able to stand.

Verse 13, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand firm. Verse 14, stand therefore.

Preparing for the spiritual battle. Secondly, standing firm in the spiritual battle. Verses 14 to 17.

Verse 14, stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness and as shoes for your feet having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one and take the helmet of salvation. Now, the most important thing about this armour may come as a surprise, but the most important thing about this armour is that it's second hand.

[19:05] Now, that might be a bit of a shock if you've never been down Lordship Lane to the charity shops and bought something from there, but it's second hand because it is the armour that the Lord Jesus Christ himself wears.

I put some references there on the outline from the book of Isaiah in chapter 11, 49 and 52 which shows that this is the armour that God himself wears in battle.

But I just want to go back again to Isaiah 59 and to that reading which we had just to see one example of this. So please turn, if you will, to Isaiah chapter 59 and page 749.

Isaiah 49, let me read from verses 16 to 17. End of verse 15 I'll start. The Lord saw it and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man and wondered that there was no one to intercede.

Then his own arm brought him salvation and his righteousness uphold him. Begs the question, doesn't it, what does God look like when he brings salvation?

[20:13] Verse 17, he put on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation on his head. He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.

This is the armour that God's king will wear when he comes to save his people. A promise fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the victorious, conquering king who has defeated the devil by his death on the cross. Which gives us a clue, I think, to what the armour is all about.

It is the gospel. As Isaiah says here, it is salvation. And as we then turn back to Ephesians chapter 6, what we see is that each item of this armour describes a different aspect of the gospel.

A life changed and transformed by the gospel. In verse 14, notice, it is the gospel of truth. The gospel speaks the truth into our world in contrast to the devil who we are told is the father of lies.

[21:23] This is the truth we are to stand on. The breastplate, verse 14 still, of righteousness. In the context of Ephesians, I think not so much the declaration that if we put our trust in Jesus we are righteous, although wonderfully that is true.

But I think instead living out our new lives that we have in Christ, living lives of holiness, living lives of righteousness. We stand firm in other words by living distinctively gospel shaped lives.

In verse 15, the shoes which bring a readiness given by the gospel to go forward in peace. I take it to go forward in peace with each other, to restore broken relationships within the church, to demonstrate our unity in Christ.

But also a readiness to proclaim the gospel of peace, peace with God to others, to our world. In verse 16, the shield of faith, the conscious everyday decision that I'm going to trust today what God says.

And I'm going to live in the light of it. Verse 17, the helmet of salvation. Do you see how it's all about the gospel? So how do we stand in this spiritual battle?

[ 22 : 49 ] By believing the gospel. By living out the gospel. By proclaiming the gospel, God's salvation. And remember because Ephesians is so focused on the church, we mustn't simply apply Ephesians chapter 6 to ourselves as individuals.

That would be a grave mistake simply to apply it to ourselves as individuals. And to forget that actually the primary application of this whole letter and therefore of Ephesians chapter 6 is to us corporately as a church.

As a church identifying with the gospel, believing the gospel, living out the gospel, being transformed by the gospel, proclaiming the gospel. It sounds so simple doesn't it at one level? And yet actually it requires all of God's strength and all of God's power to do it. And yet of course the reality is that we'll only stand firm collectively as a church if we are standing firm each and every one of us individually.

I've just finished reading Max Hastings excellent history of the Vietnam War. One of the most significant factors which contributed to the outcome of the war was the scale of drug and alcohol abuse amongst US soldiers up to 25% affected by 1970-1971.

[ 24 : 20 ] Many of them literally unable to fight. Indeed such a significant minority not engaged in a battle rendered entire platoons completely unable to stand.

Now I take it that should be an encouragement to those of us this morning who are standing firm as well as a warning to those who are not.

None of us are spiritual islands. The ability of Grace Church Dulwich to stand firm depends on whether individuals are standing firm.

Well what about verses 17 and 18? And the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication to that end keep alert with all perseverance making supplication for all the saints.

Notice really that all the weaponry so far has been defensive. This is the item which is offensive. The word of God the sword of the Spirit.

[ 25 : 39 ] In other words how is God's Holy Spirit going to be powerfully at work in us as individuals and as a local church and in the lives of those who are not yet following Jesus Christ it is as God's word is proclaimed.

That is when God's Spirit will be powerfully at work amongst us. Again there's such a contrast isn't there between what the eyes in our head see so people listening to a sermon or listening this evening to a talk at jam or studying the Bible in growth groups it looks so undramatic so very ordinary and yet actually in the spiritual world we know with the eyes of our hearts that that is when God is at work in great power by his Spirit.

Just as prayer looks weak and ineffective the eyes in our heads may tell us that prayer is simply speaking to thin air and yet the eyes in our hearts tell us that we are speaking to our Heavenly Father that we are doing so in the name of Jesus Christ who is Lord of all.

Think of the army platoon cut off deep in enemy territory their resources are few their position looks weak the enemy are at hand what do they do?

They get on the radio they call for reinforcements a few minutes later fighter jets scream overhead and the enemy position is demolished now that is the way to think about the church prayer gathering even if the puddings are much better than army rations don't you love the alls in verse 18 at all times with all prayer with all perseverance for all the saints I take it the way we begin our day the way we train our children those of us with children to begin the day our attendance at the prayer gathering I take it those things all demonstrate whether we are serious about engaging in the spiritual battle or not well let's flip it round for a moment how might we fail to stand firm as a church well look again at these items of armour and think for a moment of their opposites a failure to hold on to the truth of the gospel lives that aren't transformed by the gospel a church that stops holding out the gospel to others that stops living by faith that stops trusting in

[ 28 : 27 ] God's promises a church that loses sight of the enormous salvation that Jesus has won for us a church where we take good bible teaching for granted a church where the prayer gathering gently dwindles as we fail to engage in the spiritual battle can we see what the question is that

Ephesians chapter 6 begs of us individually begs of us together corporately Grace Church Dulwich will we stand in the spiritual battle or will we fall in fact it's the question of the whole book the whole of Ephesians is about that Stefan Zweig was the best-selling German language writer of the 1920s and 1930s he was a novelist playwright journalist and biographer he was born in Vienna in 1881 to a wealthy

Jewish textile family and between the wars he was at the center of Vienna's intellectual life he left Austria in 1934 as storm clouds gathered over Europe and eventually he settled in Brazil he wrote his memoirs *The World of Yesterday* his memoirs described the slow loss of everything which he valued and treasured as the Nazis came to power he committed suicide in 1942 the day after he finished writing it despairing of the future of Europe the tragedy is he lost heart because he never knew the Nazis would lose well in his great kindness God has given us Ephesians so that we won't do the same it is a don't lose heart letter it is a stand firm letter it is a hold on to the gospel letter you are on the winning side the plan of

God is on track a whole new creation united under the rule of Jesus Christ the plan is in place it is on track Jesus has been raised from the dead he is now Lord of all the church is God's showcase of that new creation you look at the church the local church you look at the worldwide church it confirms the whole direction that our world is heading in a new creation under the rule of Jesus