

The Spiritual War

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: 31 August 2008

Preacher: Rev. Jim Salladin

[0 : 0 0] Well, good evening, everyone. Well done. Good job. Keep your bulletins open to that second reading, and let's pray together.

Father, you have promised to work through your word by your Spirit, and we ask that you would do that now.

That you would make us able to hear your truth. That you would give us hearts that receive it. That you would give us hearts to obey it.

In order that you may be glorified. And we ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Amen.

Well, I love hiking.

And I think that's a good thing, living in this part of the world. I think they kick you out if you don't like hiking. There might be some people who kind of secretly don't like hiking, but I don't think you talk about that too much around here.

[1 : 1 6] And there are times when you're out in the wilderness, and the trees are there, and the mountains, and the lakes, and the streams, and it's all a little overwhelming.

You can ask my wife. Sometimes I just kind of, it's like wires start going haywire. It's just overwhelming to me. And it's almost at times, like there's this little taste of heaven when you're out there.

But some of us have had the experience of going hiking with less than adequate equipment. And if hiking with good equipment is a little taste of heaven, hiking with less than adequate equipment smells like the sulfur of the other place.

And I once went on a two-week hiking adventure. I was 19, and I didn't have a lot of money, and so I purchased the cheapest boots that I could find, and I didn't bother breaking them in.

Why do that? And then I went and got the cheapest rain gear I could find because it was summer.

And it's the kind that you buy in the Safeway checkout aisle, and you're not exactly sure why Safeway sells rain gear, but it's cheap and convenient, and so you buy it.

[2 : 3 8] And the backpack that I ended up using, I'm convinced, was a replica of some sort of medieval torture device. It was horrible. It left marks on my body for months.

Literally. And needless to say, the next two weeks in the Minnesota wilderness were nightmarish. They were just horrible. But I learned a lesson. Hopefully I learned a lesson.

If you're going to go on a journey, you need to have the right equipment. And the more intense the journey is that you're going on, the more important it is to have the right equipment.

Now, we're finishing up Ephesians this evening, and in the second half of the book of Ephesians, the main exhortation, the main command, is for us to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel.

It's in chapter 4, verse 1. And this walk that Ephesians speaks of is far more intense, and far more important, and far more significant than any literal journey that we could go on.

[3 : 5 3] If you've been with us as we've walked through the book of Ephesians, you know that Ephesians talks about this great regime change that has occurred in the universe, that Jesus Christ, in His resurrection, conquered all the competing powers in the world, so that now He reigns supreme on the throne of the universe.

And He's called to you and to me to be His disciples, to be His servants and His soldiers in the world. And so we are called to walk in a manner worthy of that kind of calling.

And that means we need the right equipment. But it turns out in our passage this evening that the right equipment for walking in a manner worthy of the calling is not so much hiking gear or walking shoes, it ends up it's battle armor.

And that's because according to our passage tonight and according to the Apostle Paul, as servants and soldiers for Christ, we are engaged in a fierce war.

And it's a war with real battles and real defeats and real casualties and real victories. And it's critical that you and I have a clear picture of who the enemy is that we face and what the equipment is that we have been given so that we can engage this battle rightly.

[5 : 35] So let's first talk about this enemy that we face and then we'll talk about the equipment that God has given us. Look at verse 11. Paul writes, 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 over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

The devil is not a really popular topic much. It might be a good thing. It's easy to find people that talk about spirituality generally.

It's far more difficult to hear people believe or even claim that there's any reality to the devil. I think even Christians are a bit shy to talk about the devil.

I think for some of us there's a kind of uncomfortableness with what really to make of the figure of Satan and his demons. But for you and I as biblical and historic Christians, we've got to come to terms with the fact that that there is a personal and powerful and evil force in the world that is intent on stealing and killing and destroying those who follow Jesus.

The Bible talks about him from one end to the other. You remember Genesis chapter 3 where the serpent sneaks into the garden so to speak to tempt Adam and Eve.

[7 : 29] And then in Revelation chapter 12 we see the serpent again this time as a dragon who continually is waging war on those who belong to Christ.

The Bible speaks with one voice on this issue that we as Christians as followers of Jesus we have a deadly spiritual enemy. And Satan and his demons in this passage it's clear they are powerful and they are cunning.

But praise the Lord they're defeated. Look at verse 12. And I want you to notice the words that Paul uses. They're all words that have to do with power and authority.

He says we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against and note the word rulers against the authorities against the cosmic powers over this present darkness.

Now these are all titles that emphasize power and authority. Now don't get me wrong Satan is a usurper and so he's always claiming power and authority that doesn't belong to him.

[8 : 48] but it is clear that this is not a weak enemy. That there is real danger here. And Paul's giving us a sober warning.

But when Satan and his demons attack they don't usually do it in a kind of overt display of power. It's usually not an overt aggression it's typically in subtle and cunning and stealthy ways. You look at verse 11 you see that word schemes.

The word implies a kind of constant incessant bombardment with these stealthy subtle strategies. And they're strategies that are designed to destroy us. if you've walked with Jesus for any length of time you'll have undoubtedly experienced that horrible painful experience of seeing people that you respect perhaps leaders friends they look strong and they look stable in their Christian life and you respect them and yet you're devastated when you see that they fall.

[10 : 20] Just this past summer I've heard just personally of several people that I respect that have fallen and have fallen victim to these subtle little conniving schemes of Satan and it's sobering and it's kind of bone chilling to me how Satan can get into our lives with just a little compromise and so often when Satan and his demons attack us they do it in these kind of tailored ways tailoring to our appetite and our circumstances there's a lot of different schemes that Satan uses but he always comes at us eventually to undermine the word of God and to undermine our faith in him you can always tell that that's Satan's strategy you remember in the garden of

Eden the serpent when he comes to Eve his intention was to undermine her trust in God did God really say that you can't eat from any tree of the garden you're not going to die God's just being unreasonable he's not trustworthy or remember Job's wife remember Job after this catastrophic tragedy in his family his wife finally has it and she comes to Job and she says Job why are you still trusting God curse God and die essentially saying that God can't be trusted and even when Satan comes to Jesus and tempts Jesus he's twisting scripture trying to persuade Jesus that the father's plan isn't a good one Satan's got a lot of schemes but he comes and ultimately he's always trying to undermine our trust undermine our dependence upon God because if he can separate us it's like a cheetah running after a gazelle if he can get them away from the group he's got them we have an

enemy and the enemy is powerful and the enemy is subtle and conniving but there's good news there's really good news because the enemy's been defeated and this is part of the glorious gospel that is the book of

Ephesians Paul talks about it in chapter 1 when Jesus died and rose again from the dead God seated him on the throne of the universe reading from Ephesians chapter 1 it says that he's far above and listen to the words all rule and authority far above all power and dominion and above every name that is named not only in this age but also in the ones to come friends we do have a dangerous enemy but we have a far greater Lord and he has triumphed and our Lord if you are his if you are a Christian our Lord has reached down and he's grabbed you and he's ripped you out of the control of Satan and he has given you citizenship in the kingdom of God and that's a citizenship that can't be lost so that Paul can say in Romans chapter 8 just enjoy these words enjoy this for I am certain that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of

God that is in Christ Jesus when Jesus has us he has us and he doesn't let us go we do have a powerful enemy but he has been defeated by a far stronger Lord and he is our captain and so now when we turn from looking at the enemy to looking at the equipment that God has given us to protect us it's all going to hinge on drawing us to a place where we are dependent upon him dependent upon Jesus and his strength and his armor for everything that's when we're safe let's look at the equipment look at verse 10 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 now I want you to look at those two verses and I want you to look at them and determine if I was talking to just one of you

I'd ask you to tell me where does the armor come from in those verses where does the strength come from in those verses now the answer is obvious but it's really important you notice that it's the armor of God that it's the strength of his might it's not our armor that we trust in it's not our strength that we trust in the armor we use is God's armor the strength that supports us is Christ's strength I know that's obvious but it's important because as we think about the defensive strategy against the enemy and as we think about taking on the armor of God it's important that we don't look primarily to ourselves but that we look to God and that we trust him and depend on him to equip us for the battle and it's as we depend on him that then he comes and he protects us in a variety of wonderful ways look at these vivid ways that Paul talks about

[16:59] God protects us with the belt of truth you know as Christians part of the Christian life is the discipline is the practice of running to Jesus running to the feet of Jesus like Mary and sitting there and ingesting the truth about Jesus in such a way that begins to permeate our lives and as we're saturated with God's truth we become protected because we begin to recognize the lies of the enemy we begin to see that no no no that doesn't fit with what I know about Jesus and we're equipped for the battle or the breastplate of righteousness don't think that the breastplate of righteousness has much to do with our own kind of vain human attempts at behavior management our own do goodness isn't going to protect us we're too weak for that no the breastplate of righteousness is when we receive the free gift of

Christ's righteousness and then Jesus comes and he begins to transform us from the inside out so that we begin to resemble him in holiness and as Jesus transforms us sin and temptation they begin to be repulsive to us and we're protected and we're equipped for the fight and even faith the shield of faith I hope you don't think that the faith is something we just kind of got to muster up and if we muster up enough faith then we begin to get benefits from God no friends even faith even the shield of faith is a gift from Jesus to us do you remember the father of the child who was demon possessed he ran to the feet of Jesus and said I believe Lord help my unbelief it's a good prayer and when we ask for the strength of Jesus to come and fill us with faith so that we depend more upon

God we're able to we're shielded from the flaming darts of the evil one all those schemes that would try to undermine our dependence upon God they don't work because we've been strengthened with Jesus' faith and the same is true of the helmet of salvation when we have a sure sense of our hope the hope of heaven then we'll naturally begin to lay up treasure in heaven and we won't be as distracted or as easily distracted by the vain promises of this world see part of the point that we need to see is that the armor of God our defense against the enemy it's not so much a bunch of

different sets of practices that we perform in our own strength they are all the fruit of our dependence upon Jesus we are strengthened by his might and we are armored with his armor and when we take refuge in him there's nothing that can get us but now how do we you know it says take on the armor of God how does that work well there's lots of ways it's in the sense the entirety of the

Christian life but in this passage we take on the equipment we put on the armor substantially through prayer look at verse 18 Paul tells us that we should be praying at all times in the spirit with all prayer and supplication to the end and to that end keep alert with all perseverance making supplication for the saints now I grew up doing martial arts judo and karate and it's not very impressive but the first thing they teach you is how to stand firm against an opponent and that's one of the key words in this passage stand firm against the enemy but according to Paul the emphasis here is that we stand against our great enemy not with a stance that is built to be strong in the way we might expect it to be strong we stand against our enemy by kneeling and facing Jesus in prayer we're fitted with the armor of God as we fall on our faces before God in prayer and so the primary practice in these verses for us the primary behavior the call the exhortation to us is that we would all of us together cultivate and pay attention to our prayer life and as we end I just want to encourage you and exhort you to two prayer disciplines the first is I want to encourage you to practice the presence of God verse 18 Paul says that we are to be praying at all times in the spirit now most of us know that it is an extremely wise thing I hope everyone here does this that we set aside a portion of our day to read the word excuse me to read the word and to pray and to give particular attention to our relationship with God but verse 18 isn't exactly talking about that verse 18 is exhorting us to develop a prayer life that happens throughout the day that as we walk through our day as we go to work as we interact at school as we interact with our families there is a kind of ongoing conversation attention to

[23 : 31] God's spirit and one of the things that I encourage you to do is to memorize these verses and as you go through your day pray and ask God to fit you with this armor ask God to bind you with the belt of truth as you go through your day and you are driving in the car ask God for to increase your faith ask God for this assurance the helmet of salvation and let this kind of sprinkle out through your day and as we train and as we engage in kind of practicing the presence of God will increasingly God will strengthen us to be more and more dependent upon him and the second thing I'd encourage you to do is to ask people to pray for you in specific ways again verse 18 says making supplication for all the saints and

Paul's imagining here and painting a vision of a congregation where each member is praying one for another that we all know that we're in this battle together and we're ready and poised to assist each other when one is weak another comes and strengthens them in prayer and one of the things when I look around the congregation one of the things that I wonder and it concerns me to some level is I'm concerned that some of us have never learned the discipline the practice of turning to a brother and a sister and saying will you pray for me I'm struggling in this particular area this is the particular scheme of Satan that he's warring against me right now will you pray for me and I wonder if there's some of us who have never really learned to do that a whole lot and I'm concerned that you're being buffeted and bullied by the enemy and you needn't be and I want to encourage you to risk to risk I know it sounds so scary sometimes but to grab a friend or somebody in your home group or somebody in the South Chapel every week we offer prayer and say this is how I'm struggling will you pray for me and the Lord will meet you and he will strengthen you the Lord loves to equip his people for the battle and he loves to see us safely home so let's trust him and let's be strong for the fight will you pray with me father when we think about the glorious gospel that we've seen in the book of

Ephesians father when we see the way you've exalted your son when we see the way you've poured out blessing upon us Lord our hearts are filled with thanksgiving and Lord we confess that we are weak and we need to be strengthened and we know that it is your glory to strengthen your people and so we ask will you come and strengthen us yet further will you equip us for the battle Lord for those of us who are battered and beaten down Lord will you pick us up will you restore those of us who have fallen will you strengthen those of us as we stand in order that your name may be glorified in this time and for all ages and we look forward oh Lord to that day when we will be safely home and we will praise your name saying indeed you have done it hallelujah amen