

Battling to Serve

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[0 : 00] throughout the church calendar. So we're coming to an end of that, as Nick has indicated. I'd be grateful if you had Ephesians 6 in front of you, that Bible reading. Also, we also have a service outline, which has the Bible passage in front of it, and a very brief outline of where I'm heading. But also, there's St. Paul's app, so you can get it on there as well to follow along.

One other little shout out. I don't normally do this, but we've indicated that it's, or highlight the fact that it's Ruby's birthday today. From my understanding, according to Facebook, it's also Ali Rowe's birthday today. Is that correct, Ali? Is that correct?

That is correct. Happy birthday, Ali, as well. That's the only value of Facebook, as far as I can tell. Let me pray. Father God, as we launch into your word, we ask that you would reorientate our worldviews. Amen. World War I, while it was raging in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century, the United States maintained a policy of neutrality.

At the time, millions were dying in Europe. Life went on pretty much as normal for people in the United States. There were some that were aware that there was a big war in Europe, but the majority of the population just kind of cruised on with everyday life as if it didn't happen. It didn't really impact them at all. The intention of the United States was to stay out of World War I.

President Woodrow Wilson's efforts to maintain neutrality, however, was totally disregarded by German submarines.

3rd of February, 1917, the USS Housatonic was sunk by German submarines. Three more ships, US ships, were torpedoed in the following weeks. And on the 6th of April, 1917, President Wilson signed the declaration of war against Germany. A couple of other sort of events tipped him over, such as the possible invasion from Mexico into the United States. From a nation that had an intention of staying out of World War I and to live in peace and quiet and to get on with life, they very quickly shifted into a full-blown wartime mindset. Within two and a half weeks of declaration of war, Congress passed the Liberty Loan Act to raise funds from the war effort, and \$20 billion was raised for American citizens in the next two years. Six weeks after the declaration of war, Congress passed the Selective

[2 : 49] Services Act. 24 million men between 21 and 30 were registered. Three million were drafted immediately into service. A month later, the Espionage Act put a 21-year prison sentence on anyone who hindered the war effort or aided the enemy. On the 3rd of October, the War Revenue Act increased corporate and personal income taxes and established excise, excessive profits and luxury taxes. On the 5th of April, 1918, the War Finance Corporation is formed with capital of \$500 million to support the war industry. From the moment of declaration of war in April, 1917 to armistice in November, 1918, so 18 months, 4.744 million Americans fought in the war. But the whole nation was engaged in it. The whole nation changed from the moment of declaration of war. Now, all this is just simply to say that during times of war, everything changes.

Everything changes. Everything changes. And I want us to see from Ephesians 6, that passage in front of us, that a war is in fact raging that is far more devastating than any world war we've seen. The stakes are infinitely higher. World War I and World War II were devastating for the planet. 120 million deaths. And the war that we are currently involved in is a spiritual war that sees over 50 million souls slip into a Christless eternity every year. And over the past seven years or so, we've been reforming what we've been reforming what we do as a church to get higher and higher engagement in our local area, especially, but beyond us in that battle. For me, what we're doing here, and as we've been reinforcing it throughout this vision series for us, it flows out of a biblical conviction more so than effective strategy, although strategic thinking is part of what we're doing. This biblical conviction is for what we've seen throughout the book of Ephesians as it's unfolded before us.

It's God's grand purposes for all people on the planet, no matter what culture, what generation, what people group you belong to. His purposes for his people, the church, and this world from eternity past to eternity future. Ephesians chapters 1 and 2 and 3, as we have already been there, reveals what God is doing about the mess that this universe is in because of human sin and our rebellion and rejection of God. The disintegration and disorder and the chaos and the brokenness is sold by God coming into this world himself, God the Son, the person of Jesus Christ, being made king over all things. Under his kingship, all that is disintegrated and broken gets integrated. God's purpose is to create a single new humanity through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the core fact and hope of the Christian faith, and it is the solution to the sin, the evil, the brokenness, the chaos of this world. And if you've never heard the term gospel before, on the back of the service sheet, I've given you a brief explanation in English, and there's one in Chinese and one in Korean. And what the Bible declares, what the Christian faith declares, is that there is no other way to find salvation forever than in the blood of Jesus Christ. And that's what we've seen in Ephesians 1 to 3. And Ephesians 4, 5, and 6 is how you live in accord with that grand reality of all things. The reality of who we are as Christians, as a church, who are now united in Jesus Christ. And so Ephesians is rich with the mystery and the wonder of salvation, of peace with God, and unity among believers, and giftedness to serve God's human society.

Unity, diversity, purity, and harmony, these are some of the characteristics of the new life and the new society in Jesus Christ. And they are exalted thoughts. They are wonderful thoughts.

[7 : 44] And just when you think that Paul's going to end his letter with, and they lived all happily ever after, which is kind of what you think he's going to get to, the conclusion he comes with, he basically slaps us in the face and wakes us up from our dreamy reflection. He says the beautiful life of the united and yet diverse new society is lived while camped out in the trenches of war we're in the enemy territory. That is, Christian, you need to know you're in a battle.

It's a battle for souls. J.C. Rye was the first Anglican bishop of Liverpool. He once preached a sermon about the war that Christians are involved in, and he said this, true Christianity, true Christianity, and he says, mind that word true.

There is a vast quantity of religion current in the world which is not true, and it's not genuine Christianity. There are thousands of men and women who go to churches and chapels every Sunday and call themselves Christian, but you never see any fight about their religion.

Of spiritual strife, exertion, conflict, self-denial, watching and warring, they know literally nothing at all.

Such Christianity may satisfy man, but those who say anything against it may be thought very hard and uncharitable, but it certainly is not the Christianity of the Bible. True Christianity is a fight.

[9 : 30] The true Christian is called to be a soldier and must behave as such from the day of his conversion to the day of his death. He is not meant to live a life of religious ease, indulgence, and security.

He must never imagine for a moment that he can sleep and doze along the way to heaven, like one traveling in an easy carriage. Ephesians 6.12, for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers and against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Verse 10 opens with the word finally. It's not, you know, like towards the end of this, I say, and finally, you go, oh, morning tea's on.

That's not what Paul's thinking here. The word finally is not signaling his final thought. The word is better translated for the remaining time.

Paul is indicating that the whole of the remaining time before Jesus Christ returns from when he left to when he returns to hold all of history and humanity accountable is going to be characterized by this battle.

[10 : 45] The peace which God has made through Christ's death is to be experienced only in the midst of relentless struggle against evil.

Verse 12 says it's not a war against flesh and blood. It's a supernatural war. That is, it's not just a war in the physical world with our own sin.

It's against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Now, some of you may be sitting here going, what?

Tell me, Steve, you know, you're educated, sort of, and you read stuff. How could you possibly believe in this day and age, in this spiritual stuff?

And surely you're not actually saying that there is actually a bloke called Satan or a devil. You don't really believe in a personal being who's evil. Do you?

[11 : 54] Yes. Yes, I do. The thinking of our world has changed dramatically. And when I say our world, I mean the Western world.

So we're representing about 20% of the world. It has changed dramatically. Greek philosophers in the centuries before Jesus saw the material world, including the physical human body, as subordinate, unimportant, and unreal.

And it's Greek philosophy that the Western society is built on. The ancient world was dramatically changed by Christianity.

Christianity. Because Christianity was the first of the religions that actually saw the physical world as a good creation of God.

Christianity was the first to capture the value of the physical world and human life. To put value on individual freedom. And the Christian worldview of a world crafted by a rational, personal God was a contributing foundation for the development of modern science.

[13 : 11] Modern science would not exist if it wasn't for Christianity discovering the value of the physical world. And what the modern secular world has done is taken Christian worldview, removed God from it, and amplified it to say that only the natural world matters now.

It's the only reality. This world's view suggests that everything has a physical cause and explanation. Even suggesting that love and moral feelings are functions of a brain, functions of chemistry.

This worldview is the basis of a power, very powerful consumer and technology culture, with the view that all of the world's problems will eventually bow to a scientific solution.

In other words, human reason can solve what ails us because they are only material things that ail us.

Psychology and medicine will help us adjust and overcome emotional and physical problems. We don't need spiritual resources for that. Sociology will help us to create a just society.

[14 : 26] We don't need divine virtue for that. And so, what I've just read out there seems hopelessly naive. Almost like a fairy tale.

And yet the belief that everything has a scientific explanation and a technological solution is in fact the naive response.

It's hopelessly naive. These verses are saying that everything... And I would love more time to unpack that for you, but unfortunately I can't. These verses are saying that every day there's a bigger battle at play than the many battles that we face in this physical world.

And it's a battle for the soul. That is, there's more to us as human beings than simply matter. There is more to us than the bucket full of chemicals.

80% of our world's population still recognise that humans have a material part and an immaterial part. We are both body and soul.

[15 : 33] The soul doesn't die, but the body does. And when we think about it though, it's impossible to live consistently with the view that humans don't have souls.

If humans don't have souls, then we are simply no different than just all the other buckets of chemicals.

There's no difference between a tree and a cockroach and you. No different than a blade of grass. Why then do we treat humans different to the blade of grass? Or at least I do when I'm cutting it. I don't lie my kids up out there as well. Why give a human being dignity and respect that nothing else is given?

Even if we don't intellectually believe that we've got souls, we inherently live it. Because there's something more to us than just buckets of chemicals.

[16 : 45] So Christianity, it's not naive. It's not simplistic. It hasn't got all the answers, but it's not naive and it's not simplistic. Christianity sees that our problems are multidimensional.

Multidimensional. And the consensus of the Bible is that human beings are involved in a spiritual war for souls while we live in the physical world. While we think that our problems are just flesh and blood, just material, and we can fix it with better education and better technology and better police and better social programs, we will always be defeated.

We have these things in increasing measure in our world ever since the dark ages. And our world is not getting any better.

We're in a much more complex battle. And what this passage and what the consensus of the Bible is, is this is the world that Satan does his work.

1 John 5:19 says, We know that we are children of light and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. Ephesians 2:2, just a little bit early, we've looked at already, the devil is called the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. [18:10] And so the devil and his angels are a great demonic enemy with a defined and disciplined chain of command. Satan is terribly powerful. He doesn't possess anything like the power of the infinite God, though he can only be in one place at one time.

For instance, with his army of evil agents, he imitates God's omnipresence and his omnipotence. He desires to be God more than anything else.

And in fact, his desire to be God more than anything else is at the center of his terrible, total spiritual evil. And it's what he'd led humanity to, which is what the Bible declares.

It led his humanity into wanting to be God also, just like him in his deception. And verse 12 alludes us to this, describing the enemy as the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil.

Even those throughout history who have gone very low in evil in what they perpetrate against humanity do not in any sense match Satan's evil.

[19:19] Satan has no compassion, no conscience, no remorse, no morals. He feeds on pain and anguish and filth.

There is nothing in Satan which is even remotely redeemable. There is no virtue. There's only dark void. That's it. He is supremely cunning. Verse 11 there speaks of the devil's schemes and he's been honing his methods of deception for millennia.

He's an accomplished philosopher and theologian and psychologist. He has studied for thousands of years and enough time to become astonishingly brilliant at every single discipline directed in order to deceive humanity.

He is the ultimate manipulator and subverter and actor. 2 Corinthians 11 says that one of his deadly methods is masquerading as an agent of God's.

And this technique is just mixing enough truth with falsehood to make it seem plausible. Another one of his is sensuality.

[20:29] Many souls are sold to accommodate a downward spiral in morality. And another which is just instilling doubts about God's goodness.

Whatever his tactic, he seldomly attacks in the open. His strategies administered by his agents are nearly always unseen.

They are shrewd and they're perfectly tailored for you and for me. He operates best when he can convince us that he doesn't even exist.

He's done a great job of that in the Western world and to persuade us that the Christian life is in fact not a fight. He is evil beyond our comprehension with our conscience, without principle.

He's diabolically cunning and he is after us. He hates God. He hates God's children.

[21:36] He hates the church. He hates the mission and vision of this church to see the Lord Jesus treasured together by us in such a way that more and more people from every culture, tribe and language is rescued from his evil clutches.

He hates it. He hates our plan to be united, multi-ethnic and socially diverse church. He desires to destroy the work of the Father to make one society in the Lord Jesus forever.

He will do whatever he can to destroy the work of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in your life and in the life of this church. This is Paul's cosmic perspective.

And if you're sitting there going, no, no, no, there is no spiritual realm, can I ask you not to be so naive and dig deeper?

Now, all would be despair except I've only described part of Paul's cosmic perspective.

[22:46] Among mortals like us, Satan has no equal, but he is far exceeded by the God of the Bible who's revealed himself, the God of the universe, the God who's created all things.

Satan is nowhere near God's evil. Sorry, equal. Let me just retract that. Equal, equal, equal.

Nowhere near, he's equal.

Okay. Not even close. Not even close. And this is different between the Greek philosophy of old that saw good and evil as a dualism.

Both Satan and God are fighting together and hopefully one will get the upper hand. Not even equal. Satan is finite, God is infinite. In fact, Colossians 1 and 2 says that the entire spiritual realm owes its existence to Jesus Christ, including the thrones, the powers, the rulers, the authorities, both visible and invisible, both heaven and on earth.

Christ is not only more powerful by being virtue of Satan's creator, but because he defeated Satan on the cross. That's what the early chapters of Ephesians have already declared to us.

[24 : 04] He has sealed their doom. Although in this present age, they still exercise a control over those who have not found freedom in the Lord Jesus Christ just yet, as we have already sung this morning.

If we are filled with the Holy Spirit, Satan's forces cannot subdue you. In Jesus Christ, there is always victory. But, be realistic.

Real Christianity is a fight, but the fight is the Lord Jesus' fight. That's the good news. The fight is his. The battling's ours.

Paul leaves two commands that dominate, and I want to do this real quick, that dominate his advice in these last two verses of the letter. The first is in verse 10. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

It's a passive command. Be made strong. Jesus Christ has the victory, and Ephesians 1 and 2 declare that he has given us the resources to stand and flourish.

[25 : 10] We cannot fight this evil by ourselves. We are totally dependent upon Jesus, and Paul expresses here what you might see, a proper combination of divine enabling and human cooperation.

He does it again in the second command, in verse 11. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. God has mercifully made provision for us in Christ so that we can stand and not fall.

And the provision is his armor. It's a picture of a soldier in a battle. So if your aim is to persevere in the Christian life, not to be defeated in the greatest sense that is in a spiritual battle, then you must put on this armor described in these verses.

And we're told four times in these verses that the need to stand, to stand our ground. Paul is concerned about our stability. Wobbly Christians don't have a firm foothold in the gospel of the Lord Jesus are easy prey.

Easy prey. Paul here wants to see Christians so strong, so stable, that they're stable in the face, able to stand in the face of all of Satan's schemes and stable even when the day of evil comes, as it says.

[26 : 43] So this armor is essential. It's described in the following verses. Let me just quickly touch on it. The belt of truth, verse 14, basically held the sword in place.

And to stand firm in the battle, you must be a person. The sword here is the truth of the revelation of God in the scriptures, in the Bible. And for that truth to have transformed you as a person into truthful character.

Essentially, important, that's really essential. It's so important in a world where absolute truth is rejected. The irony of that statement that there is no such thing as absolute truth is that that in itself is an absolute truth statement.

That's the irony of it. And we're saying our absolute truth is in the scriptures, be filled with it.

Secondly, the breastplate of righteousness, verse 14, the breastplate of righteousness is God's own righteousness, his own goodness and right standing freely given to those who believe in Jesus Christ.

This is the good news of the Christian gospel as we've seen in Ephesians 1 and 3. It's written on the back of your service sheet again. Jesus Christ, perfect life, right standing before God has become yours.

[27 : 58] You don't earn it. You don't work for it. You don't contribute to your right standing before God at all. It's Jesus.

He's achieved it and given it to you as a gift. And not only that, he's taken my unrighteousness to the cross and dealt with it. A great protection against the thrust of Satan which remind us constantly of our own unrighteousness and our own unworthiness before God is the gospel to hold it close.

Thirdly, feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. Verse 15, the peace with God that comes to us in and through the gospel of the Lord Jesus firmly plants our feet and gives

stability in battle.

A gospel that declares that you are not at war with God. God. He's not your enemy. You are not at war with him but in fact at peace with him through Jesus.

Number four is the shield of faith. Verse 16, as we are locked in this battle with the enemy, this is the battle that you will experience deep in your soul day in and day out. Repeated volleys of temptations and rejection and criticism and hypocrisy and deception and doubting of God's goodness and doubting of the truth of his word, doubting even his existence.

[29 : 25] That is the battle that you fight constantly in your soul. But up comes the shield of faith against a thousand of those fiery arrows as we believe and trust what God has revealed about himself in his word that in Jesus Christ you are his son as we have already sung.

Five is the helmet of salvation which is the assurance of salvation and the resulting confidence it brings. This helmet assures us that no matter what happens in this battle we will be saved and we will be we will experience victory forever in Jesus Christ.

that's the outcome of this battle. Lastly the sword of the spirit we are told that it is the word of God the word of God cuts to the heart it lays it open so that people would believe and repent and be made alive in Jesus Christ.

We're at war and what this verse tells us as does the rest of the New Testament in fact all the Bible is our razor's sharp weapon is God's word. That's how Jesus when he was tempted by Satan in Matthew 4 he used the word of God to repel him and our razor sharp weapon is the word of God and we would be fools to lower it simply because our culture says it can't cut.

Our enemy wants us to believe that our weapon is irrelevant in the modern age that it's archaic that it's not understandable so keep it in its sheath.

[31 : 17] So friends we must read it we must meditate on it we must memorize it we must study it we must love it the weapon that we fight with are not the weapons of this world which brings us to verse 18 and the importance of prayer.

And pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests with this in mind be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Prayer isn't an added element like another part of the armor it's the thing that pervades if you like the whole war.

The prayer referred to here is comprehensive pray on all occasions regularly and constantly with all kinds of prayer and requests for it takes many and varied forms being alert and always keeping on praying because we don't want to fall asleep in a battle for all the saints since the unity of God's new society which has been the preoccupation of this whole letter of Ephesians must be reflected in our prayers.

Not simply God give me a better job but God's agenda being reflected in our prayers. And so my first and my simple challenge to us at the end of our vision series is to rethink your priorities in these two areas right now.

Commit to a new resolve to be a Christ centered Bible saturated follower of Jesus who's devoted to prayer as we move into 2020. Be committed to that. Commit to a new venture with God today to pray for this church for its leadership for its ministries and its mission and for the souls the souls of people that they would trust Jesus Christ.

[32 : 56] My second simple challenge is to take us back to the beginning and for us to take on a wartime mindset in regard to the spiritual war that we're engaged in.

A wartime mindset is where we pour our resources into the battle to win the battle. The thrust of this whole series over the last six weeks is about engaging our time our talents and our treasures our prayers and our energy to see God's global vision advance here in your own life but also in the lives of those who are not here at the moment.

Our collective response is dependent upon every individual response. We want each one of us first and foremost to sign up to serve.

We also want every one of us to give financially. as we do each year we pledge to the work that we're doing a year ahead to engage in this battle to see many souls won for Christ and as we do each year our pledging and our leaders that is our parish council and our staff they do it in advance as a sign that we are leading you as a church into this.

Now in a moment they're going to come up even though they've already done that they've already all pledged to me they're going to come up in a moment they're going to also put cards in here just as a sign of partnership with us as a church.

[34 : 32] The reason why we pledge in advance is because we want to lead the church in this matter. So I'm really happy to declare and I'm going off script here John or whoever's up there I can't see sorry is that Owen it is Owen and Adrian thank you I'm happy to declare that our leaders have already pledged this is 27 people staff and parish council have pledged \$4,321 a week that's slightly over than 40% of our budget next year they have also on top of that given \$29,600 towards the target of \$75,000 that likewise is 40% of that target's already been hit when we hit here this morning so what I'm calling you today is to follow them and to make a sustained effort not just with a one-off response but a sustained effort to resource the war into 2020 right now

I'm going to invite John is Ash here as well Jake Aaron come on up these guys are our four interns Christians and right now we've got 30 grand to go towards the battle engaging these guys in that but I want to pray for them because they're all here today and I want to pray for them that they would be used by God to be effective soldiers and servants as we even just prayed for our two sisters in baptism they would be effective soldiers and servants for the Lord Jesus in this battle and that we would resource them as well let's do that gracious heavenly father I want to thank you that you spread your gifts ashore to all of your people thank you that the Lord Jesus has given his gifts to his church he held them all and he's given them and dispersed them amongst us so that we might continue his work in the world we pray for our four brothers and sister here in the Lord Jesus who have been impressed by you to be set apart for the war in this church but also beyond this church to live a life of vocational service we ask that you would fully equip them for that work that as they battle not just with the devil beyond and the world from the outside but their own hearts within the flesh within Lord I pray that they would hold your gospel close that they would know always that they are your much loved children and that you would continue to equip them for this battle and as a result of what they do that we would see many souls won for you for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ Amen