Commitment Sunday 2011

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Date: 26 November 2011

Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0:00] Well, good morning, St. Paul's, and welcome to Commitment Sunday. We have arrived at the end of our Commitment series for this year. We have arrived at the end of our Partners 2020 weekend.

And what a time it has been as we have progressed through this letter to the church at Ephesus. We have had unfolded before us God's grand purposes from eternity to eternity.
God's purpose, as we have seen, is to create a new single humanity through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.
God's plan is to unite His universal church and, in fact, all of creation under the Lord Jesus' feet.
That, my friends, is God's agenda for His world.
It's His agenda for history. It's His agenda for your life. In Christ, we have seen that the old days of division are gone.
[1:05] God the Father has one family. The Lord Jesus has one people. The Holy Spirit has one body. And what beauty we have seen in these chapters.

The mystery of election. The wonder of salvation. Peace with God. Unity amongst believers from every cultural background. Giftedness to serve God and people.
We have had a call to demonstrate our unity in the Christian fellowship, while at the same time rejoicing in the diversity of gifts and ministries. We have been called to put away all the uncleanliness of our pre-conversion behavior and live a life of holiness.
We have been called to submit to one another in every kind of domestic relationship and promote harmony in the home. Unity, diversity, purity, and harmony.
These are some of the characteristics of the new life and the new society under Christ. And what a beautiful ideal. Such exalted thoughts that we have seen in the first five chapters of this book.
[2:17] And just when you think Paul's about to end his letter with, and they all lived happily ever after, he slaps us across the face and wakes us up from our dreamy reflection.

Because this letter closes with the ugly blood and grime of warfare with our enemy.
The beautiful life, as we have seen for five chapters, is lived out while cant in the trenches of war in the enemy's territory.
Verse 12. In your Bibles, Ephesians 6. Pick them up and have a look at it. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.
Brothers and sisters, we are at war. We're at war. A long and protracted war.
[3:32] Verse 10 opens with the word finally. That is not signaling for Paul and for his readers. I'm nearly at the end of my letter. The word finally is better translated for the remaining time.

Paul is indicating here that the whole of the remaining time before Christ returns will be characterized by warfare. It will be characterized by conflict.
The peace which has been made through Christ on the cross is to be experienced only in the midst of a relentless struggle against evil.
Verse 12 says that it is not a war against flesh and blood. It is a supernatural war. And so conventional weapons and tactics are useless.
It is a personal war too. The word struggle indicates hand-to-hand combat. Smart bombs aren't being dropped from silent drones 50,000 feet above the earth's surface.
[4:37] This is a swaying back, locked in hand-to-hand combat with the evil one. It is mortal combat. Sweat on sweat.

Breath on breath. It is also a futile war if it is fought in and by our own strength. We are involved in a battle with a formidable enemy where conventional tactics are useless.

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If we attempt to spread the influence of the kingdom of God in this world by using conventional wisdom, human wisdom and tactics of this world, trading with them, strength with strength, cunning with cunning, manipulation with manipulation, anger with anger, we will lose for our opponent is too great.
And Paul is quite specific about our opponents. Our struggle is against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.
Our war is against powerful forces who have the run of the heavenly realms. Now they do not have the run of the highest heaven where Christ is seated at the right hand of God as we saw that in chapter 1 verse 20 and where believers are seated with him as we saw in chapter 2 verse 6 but they do move freely about the rest of creation.
[6:13] The consensus of scripture is this world is Satan's domain. 1 John 5 verse 19 says, We know that we are children of God and the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

2 Corinthians 4.4 The God of this age, referring to the evil one, Satan, the devil, the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.
And even in Ephesians 2.2 the devil is called the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. This is the devil's world.
And that is why he was able to make a genuine offer of all the kingdoms of the world to the Lord Jesus if only he would bow down and worship him in Matthew chapter 4.
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 God.
[7:21] He can only be in one place at one time. But with his army of evil spirits he imitates God's omnipresence and omnipotence.

He desires to be God more than anything else. In fact, his desire to be God is the very centre of his terrible total spiritual evil. Verse 12 alludes to this in describing the enemy as the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil.
Now of course we know from Romans 1 to 3 that we are evil. We are totally depraved. Which means that every part of our beings is tainted by sin.
But it doesn't mean that we're as bad as we possibly could be because there's always room for deprovement. And yet even those who throughout history who have gone very low in acts of evil do not match Satan's evil.
Satan, our enemy the one in whom we are bound together in mortal combat has no conscience no compassion no remorse no morals.
[8:44] He feeds on pain and anguish and filth. There is nothing in Satan which is redeemable. There is no virtue but only a dark cannibalistic void.

He is also supremely cunning verse 11 speaks of the devil's schemes or the devil's methods and he has been honing his schemes and his methods for millennia.
He is an accomplished philosopher. He is an accomplished theologian. He is an accomplished psychologist. He has studied for thousands and thousands of years enough time to be astonishingly brilliant in every area of discipline.
He is the ultimate manipulator subverter and actor. 2 Corinthians 11 says that one of his deadly methods is to masquerade as an agent of light.
He is that cunning that accomplished that he can pull off being a servant of God. And so we should expect that his servants would masquerade as servants of God as well.
[10:00] Satan specializes in many dirty techniques to win the battle. He is not governed by a Geneva Convention of Spiritual Warfare. He desires to win and in winning he desires to destroy.

One technique is to mix just enough truth with falsehood to make the falsehood seem plausible. Another is sensuality. Many souls have been sold out to accommodate a downwardly spiralling morality.
Another is to instill doubts about God's goodness. Whatever his tactic he seldom seldom attacks openly. His strategies administered by his evil spirits are nearly always unseen.
They are virtually always shrewd and perfectly tailored for you and for me. that we might come under the influence of his schemes.

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He operates best when he can convince people that he does not exist. He persuades us that life that we are living right now is not a battle. That we are not in warfare.
[11:11] He is evil beyond our comprehension and without conscience or principle. He is diabolically cunning and he is after us.

He hates Christ. He hates God's children. He hates the church. He hates the mission and vision of St. Paul's Chatswood that we as a people would know Christ, treasure Christ and represent Christ so that the people in our area are rescued from his evil clutches.
He hates it. And therefore he desires to destroy the work of the Father to make one society in Christ that brings glory to him and he will do whatever he can to destroy the work of the gospel in your life. He will do whatever he can to destroy the work of the gospel at St. Paul's Chatswood. He will do whatever he can to distract us to make the small things big and the big things small.
He will cunningly labor to put up the walls of division that the cross removes. He will labor to subvert our witness. He will labor to downplay the spiritual war and lead us into a full sense of all is at peace and comfort and safety.
[12:35] This my friends is Paul's cosmic perspective with all its chilling implications.

And all would be despair except that's only part of his cosmic perspective. On earth amongst mortals Satan has no equal.
evil. You are no match to him. But in the heavenly realms he is far exceeded by a triune God. There is no dualism here. Satan is not the counterpart of God. Satan is finite and God is infinite. In fact Colossians 1 and 2 says that the entire spiritual realm owes its existence to Christ including thrones powers rulers authorities both visible and invisible both in heaven and on earth.
But Christ is not only more powerful by virtue of being Satan's creator but because he defeated Satan at the cross. Satan and all his cronies are under the feet of the Lord Jesus.
[13:55] He has sealed their doom although in this present age they still exercise control over those who have not found freedom in Christ. If we are filled with the spirit Satan's forces cannot subdue us but those who neglect Christ's resources those who do not take up the weapons that he has given us and take on this devil and all his schemes with human wisdom and conventional tactics they place themselves in harm's way as do those who give the enemy room in their lives.

In Christ there is always victory. So what then are we to do? Paul leaves two commands for us that dominate his advice in the last final verses of this letter.
The first is verse 10 finally be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. This command is in fact a passive command it is literally be made strong in the Lord that is we cannot fight Satan ourselves we are totally dependent upon Christ the power is his and without his strength we will falter and we will fall and yet the command here is that we still need to be strong in him and Paul here I think expresses the proper combination of divine enabling and human cooperation he does it again and again throughout this letter and he does it here with his second command in verse 11 put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes it is God's armor it is his armor and without it we will be fatally unprotected but we still need to take this armor up and put it on
God has made provision for us to stand so that we will not fall and the provision is his armor God is able to keep us from falling according to Jude and the way he keeps us from falling is by fitting us out for successful spiritual combat and so my friends if your aim is to persevere in the Christian life and not be defeated by the schemes and the methods of the evil one then you must put on the armor that's described here in these verses we are told four times in these verses of the need for us to stand Paul is concerned here for our stability as the battle rages wobbly Christians who don't have a firm foothold in Christ are easy prey for the evil one and so
Paul wants to see Christians so strong and stable that they are even stable in the face of Satan's schemes and stable when verse 13 says when the day of evil comes or the day of very special time pressure and so the full armor of God here is essential it's described in the following verses the belt of truth verse 14 held the sword in place it didn't just hold the sword in place but it held up the soldier's tunic so that the soldier was not hindered as they charged into battle to stand firm in the battle you must be a person here filled with truth filled with the truth of the revelation of God in the scriptures and you must be transformed by that truth so that you will become a truthful person not just to know the truth but for that truth to transform you so that you are a person of truth not half truths not a bleak language truth fullness secondly the breastplate of righteousness verse 14 was a metal piece that covered the front of the body to protect the vital organs and especially the heart■

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loose face which saysλιi will believe what God says and not the messages of the evil one.
[20:10] Five is the helmet of salvation in verse 17, which is the assurance of salvation and resulting confidence that it brings to us.

The helmet assures us that no matter what happens in this battle, no matter what happens, I am saved.
I am rescued. I am secure in Christ and I have victory in him. Lastly is the sword of the spirit in verse 17 and we are told here that it is the word of God.
What we are to understand about the sword of the spirit is that when we take it up, we we have in our hands the word of God, the supreme weapon for defensive and offensive battle.
The word of God cuts to the heart. It lays open the heart so that people would believe, so that they would repent, so that they would be rescued from the clutches of the evil one and made alive.
[21:23] We are at war and our razor sharp weapon is God's word and we would be fools to lower it just simply because our culture says it can't cut.

We would be fools to lay it to one side because our enemy wants us to believe it is irrelevant, it is archaic, it is not understandable.
We would be fools to have ministries that minimize the word of God and to push it to one side.
It is the only weapon that cuts the heart. The weapons that we fight with are not the weapons of this world according to 2 Corinthians 10.
And so my friends, take up the word of God and read it and meditate upon it and memorize it and study it and love it and speak it and speak it.
[22:42] You can have great conversations with people. You can have warm, beautiful conversations with people, but unless the word of God is spoken, the heart is not cut to see the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Do not lower that weapon. The Christian warrior dressed in full armor, the full armor of God is a formidable picture.
I hope you get the sense that these verses here are calling us to action, to wake us up out of a comfortable stupor. That if you are there in the enemy's battlefield, in the trenches with your deck chair out and your umbrella up and your cocktail in your hand, throw it to one side and put the armor on and get into the battle is what it's saying.
Get ready. The Christian warrior here gets ready. He tightens his belt. His heart pounds under the breastplate. He scuffs his feet at the earth with his studded boots to get a firm grip.
He takes up his shield in anticipation of the fiery arrows that are coming for him. He repositions his helmet and he tests the edge of his sword. His heart pounds.
[24:00] The sweat falls. And the warrior stands motionless as the enemy charges at him. And then he does the most amazing thing.

He falls to his knees in deep, profound prayer. Make no mistake, there will be action. There will be hand-to-hand combat.
He will rise and he will use his sword, but it will all be bathed in prayer. And this is the picture as you read into verse 18. Prayer isn't added as another part of the armor.
It actually pervades all of the spiritual warfare. The scriptures and prayer belong together as the two chief weapons that the spirit puts in our hands.
The sword of the spirit. The most effective weapon for both offensive and defensive battle and prayer.
[25:23] That gives the sword all its power. The prayer referred to here is comprehensive. We are to pray on all occasions, both regularly and constantly. With all kinds of prayers and requests, for it takes many and varied forms.

Because being alert and always keep on praying because you don't want to ever give up. And you don't want to ever fall asleep. For all the saints. Since the unity of God's new society, which has been the preoccupation of this whole letter to the Ephesians.
Must be reflected in our prayers. Most Christians pray sometimes with some prayers. With some degree of perseverance and for some of the people.
But to replace some with all. In each of these expressions would be to climb to a new dimension of our prayer life.
And my friends, we need it here at St. Paul's. If the gathering on a Sunday afternoon once a month is the extent of our prayers.

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[26:27] I'm amazed at how few people gather. And when we do gather, how much we struggle to pray for God's agenda for his church.

Against the prayer that is described here, the principalities and powers are helpless. Without prayer, we are much too feeble and much too flabby to stand against the might of the forces of evil. So let me remind you again, St. Paul's, brothers and sisters, friends. We are in cosmic battle. We're at war.
Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. And the basic spiritual weapons of our warfare are the word and prayer.
And so my simple challenge to you is to rethink your priorities in these two areas. Commit today, on Commitment Sunday, commit today to a new resolve to be a Christ-centered, Bible-saturated warrior who's devoted to prayer.
[27:44] As per two of our core values, commit today to a new venture with God. My second simple challenge is to take on a wartime mindset in regard to the spiritual war that we're engaged in.

Timothy reminds us that the soldier doesn't get entangled in civilian affairs. He doesn't get entangled with civilian affairs.
The soldier has a job. And that's to fight an enemy. We're encamped in enemy territory, so it doesn't make sense to construct mansions and build up treasures.
Let us stand together with a wartime mindset, firmly trusting in the mighty power of our Lord Jesus. The wartime mindset is where you pour your resources into winning the battle.
We work together in giving our time and our prayers and our energy and our money to winning the war. And that is what I'm calling you to do today. People are going to hell right now just metres from us under the influence of our enemy.
[29:10] That is the battle that we're involved in. And one of our enemy's great seductions is to lure us into a comfortable, distracted life.

This year, Nellie and I have increased our giving to St. Paul's to $700 a month for the ministry here. You know my pledge as I do each year. Together, the staff and parish council have already pledged so far $6,738 a week for the battle here.
And so I now call you to follow them by having a wartime mindset and setting your resources to the battle.

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