

We are Stronger Together

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[0:00] Well, good morning, everyone. Damien has just prayed about the wars that are currently raging in our world. And most of us are probably unaware that we're currently experiencing in our world at the moment! the highest number of active armed conflicts that we've seen since World War II that's currently operating in the world. Now, there's all different kinds of wars. There's eight major wars.

Many are raging in our world. A major war is categorised by annual deaths of more than 10,000 people. There's 11 minor wars and there's over 130 armed conflicts currently going. There's approximately 2 billion people, that's about 25 per cent, a quarter of the world's population, live in areas where they're personally impacted by these wars and these armed conflicts. 2 billion people. 120 million people are currently displaced because of those conflicts with 100 million people in need of humanitarian assistance because of the crisis that they're having day by day. That's the world right now. That's where we live. Most of us go about our daily business here in Sydney not even thinking about those wars. You know, they come up on Facebook feeds and stuff like that and we look at the news when we get a chance. But we go about our daily business not thinking about them so much and really only impacted by it when we drive the car into the service station at the moment. That seems to be the main thing for us. And when we get to the last verses of Ephesians, as we wind up this vision series, we actually read here of a cosmic war that every soul is involved in and it has devastating consequences for all of humanity. And on the most part, it's another war that we're unaware of. In fact,

I dare say that the vast majority of us, except for maybe my community group from Friday night, would be unaware, even coming to church this morning, that there's a cosmic battle raging in my soul in order to be here and all around us to be here. So that's what we're up to today. Ephesians 6, get the passage open. And we've got four points that we're journeying through in this text.

Verse 10. First of all, we need to know the wall. Verse 10 opens with the word finally. And it's not like, you know, at the end of the sermon where the preacher says find and you go, fantastic. It's actually a word that means for the remaining time, for the remaining time. And so what Paul's saying here is he's referring to the time for the Ephesians from now for you Ephesians until the time where we have seen in Ephesians chapter one, where Christ gathers, God gathers all of his redeemed people to himself into his presence forever. He says, until that day comes, from now until that day comes, here's the expectation of what's going on for you, the church.

This is what he says. Verse 10. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power, put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. So these verses are the dramatic and glorious climax to the book of Ephesians. And Ephesians has unfolded for us. Let me just give you a quick summary. It's unfolded for us. God's glorious plan for all time and space to gather people from every tribe, language and nation under the Lordship of Jesus into a newer society that are his forever in his presence for our joy and his glory. And what God does is the way he achieves that plan is in time and space is through God the Son entering human history in the person of Jesus Christ, the dying of cross for humanity's rebellion against God and Jesus rising triumphantly over death. That is, Jesus killed off death. He met God's justice for our sin and he defeated the forces of evil.

[5:11] And Paul explained in chapter 1 verse 21 that Jesus triumphed over the devil at the cross. And after his resurrection from the dead, Jesus was enthroned in heaven to rule over all powers on earth, in heaven and

under the earth. And God continues that plan to rescue people from Satan's destructive influence as he grants them saving faith in the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ and brings them, gathers them into his new society. And he's been working at that for 2,000 years and continues to work at it now. And what God now does is he displays his glory. He displays his wisdom and his goodness and his goodness and the magnificence of his plan to rescue humanity in Jesus by lifting up his church.

His church is his trophy for all the spiritual realms to see. He holds it up as his glorious trophy. And as he does that in the spiritual realm and Satan walks past, it's a reminder. When he sees God's trophy lifted, that is the reminder that he's defeated. The church is his reminder that he and his whole army are defeated.

And he hates it. He hates it. He hates the fact that Christ is the victor and he is the defeated one. And so he continues to battle to destroy the trophy.

[7:31] When Paul says our battle isn't against flesh and blood here, what he's saying is that behind and beyond all the evil of flesh and blood, all the evil of war and all the evil of greed and envy and gossip is a war that is going on in the spiritual realm that is the ultimate source of all evil that we experience in our world.

That's what he's saying there.

We can never understand the depths of the problem of evil in human history. Right now, there is a cosmic war going on to destroy what God is doing in creating a new people for himself in Jesus. For instance, and you see it at several points here. You see it in the New Testament. But in Ephesians 4, verse 26 and 27, I preached at least a couple of weeks ago, it says specifically, do not be angry with each other.

Why? So that the devil doesn't get a foothold. And he's talking about relationships within the church.

[9:20] In other words, anger is, if you like, a crack that allows Satan to work his way in there and expand the crack and make it worse in order to destroy what God is building.

And in fact, every instruction that I talked about, you know, that we see here in chapters 4 and 5, instructions to take off the old self and to put on the new self, to get rid of the old behaviours of the old, you know, which follows Satan and his ways, and put on the new behaviours in Christ, in every single area of life of church, of marriage, of relationships, of parenting, of work in the wider world, is all done in the context of spiritual warfare.

That is, it's not about willpower. Change is not about willpower. It is about warfare. The word struggle, at the beginning of verse 12, indicates hand-on-hand battle, which means it's not a struggle that's out there being done by a few.

It's a very personal struggle, hand-on-hand. It's literally the image that we have here is the locked-in mortal combat with your enemy where you are swaying, you're on the ground, you're rolling in the mud, you are, it's a battle for the death, and it's sweat on sweat, it's breath on breath, it is blood on blood.

It's not bombs dropped from 40,000 feet. That is, this is the moment-by-moment battle that every Christian is involved in until Jesus winds up history and finally crushes Satan under his foot.

[11:36] You see, we're going to know that's what's happening for us right now. We're going to know the war. Secondly, what we also need to know is the enemy. We need to know the enemy and his tactics.

Now, verse 11 mentions the devil. Verse 12 calls the enemy, the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world and the spiritual force of evil.

So, the Bible is pretty clear that the devil and his fallen angels are personal, supernatural beings, not equal with God in any measure, created beings, but what is at the centre of Satan's evil is a desire to be God more than anything else.

And so, what we see in the scriptures is that Satan, he has no conscience, he has no compassion, he has no remorse, he has no morals, he feeds on pain and anguish and filth.

In fact, there's nothing in Satan which is redeemable at all. There is no virtue at all. He is just a dark void. And he hates God.

[13:00] He hates God's church and he hates God's people. And his one passion, one aim, knowing that he himself is defeated, is to defeat the trophy that God holds up, that displays his magnificence and his glory to the world.

And so, what God, sorry, what God doesn't, but Paul also doesn't want us to make the mistake here of underestimating the devil's power. It's why he doesn't just say the devil and his angels or his demons.

He actually says, the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world, the spiritual forces of evil, our enemy is formidable. And yet, on the other hand, he doesn't want us to overestimate them either because in verse 10, finally, in these days of cosmic war, he says, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

In other words, in the battle, don't be cowardly, don't be weak, don't be afraid, expect victory. So that's who he is.

We also need to know some of his battle tactics. Verse 11 mentions the devil's schemes. Literally, the devil's methods in warfare.

[14:40] His battle devices, his tactics, if you like. And he's got many of them, but really, they're characterised, if you like, into two main strategies.

In his preface to his book, *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis wrote that there are two equal and opposite errors that the devil wants all people to fall into.

And they're linked to what I've just mentioned. One strategy is to disbelieve the existence of the devil and his crew, and the other is to have an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.

One is to overestimate, one is to underestimate. Lewis wrote, they themselves, referring to Satan and his buddies, they themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.

You see, the underestimator, the materialist, sees everything in this world, every evil in this world, as having a natural or a material explanation.

[16:04] It's because you're not educated enough. It's because you're dropped on your head as a baby. It's because of your environment, your disposition.

Everything has a material reason and therefore can be solved. The under-spiritual approach never or very rarely takes the cosmic war into account.

Every problem can therefore be fixed via education, medicine, social awareness, counselling, good leadership, that sort of stuff.

The over-estimator sees absolutely everything as spiritual and blames everything on the devil and doesn't see the complexity of a fallen world and God's gracious provision of education, medicine, leadership and so on and so forth.

So you've got the under-estimator and the over-estimator and Satan's happy with both. There are way too many Christians who don't consider the spiritual warfare and way too many Christians who attribute everything to Satan and take no personal account at all.

[17:32] I've actually know of someone who when they burnt their dinner on the stove cast Satan out of the stove. An over-estimator.

No responsibility for taking their eye off the pot. It's all Satan's fault. And so before we blame the devil for our gossip and our slander and our greed, we need to see them as personal moral failings where we are losing the skirmishes in the wall because we're not taking God's word seriously.

Both the under-estimator and the over-estimator minimise and reduce evil. That's what they do. That's their problem. Either way, Satan's happy.

Now, Satan's schemes, there's his kind of main strategies, if you like, but he's got a couple of tactics which are also two areas which are equal and opposite lies and they are lies that infect the heart of the Christian.

The name devil is the Greek word *diabolos* which is where we get our English word *diabolical* and we go, oh yeah, I know *diabolical*, I know that word.

[19:09] maybe we don't because the verb form of *diabolos* means to slander, to lie, to be a malicious gossip.

Fundamentally, Satan is a liar which is why it's essential that we be people of truth. It's the opposite of lies.

And I think unfortunately, thanks to Hollywood for this one, when we think of spiritual warfare, we think of horror movies and possession, out-of-body experiences, heads spinning around, black eyes, green puke, that kind of stuff.

We think of spiritual warfare as possession. And yet, that's rarely what we see in the Bible.

And in fact, it's not even his first tactic. When he first shows up in the Bible, in the Garden of Eden, he doesn't possess Eve, he doesn't possess Adam, he lies to them.

[20:30] He takes God's word and distorts it, and he puts a lie in the heart. His name means that he's a liar, he's a slanderer, he's a malicious gossip. And so what the devil does, he doesn't make a good person bad, he makes a flawed person worse.

pokes. He pokes the crack that's open, he pokes at it, pokes at what is already there lying in my heart, and he utilizes it to destroy.

And there are two basic lies that he uses, equal and opposite lies, temptation and accusation, temptation and accusation.

The temptation lie gets a person to have a too high view of themselves for their morality, the accusation lie gets a person to have too low a view of themselves and with it Christ's forgiveness. With the lie of temptation, what Satan does with that lie is he hides God's holiness and how much he hates sin and he emphasizes God's forgiveness, his love and his mercy.

[21:59] With the lie of accusation, what he does to your heart is he hides God's love and his forgiveness and his mercy while emphasizing God's holiness, his righteousness, his judgment and condemnation is sin.

See how it works? Temptation accusation. In his book, Precious Remedies Against Satan Devices, Thomas Brooks, 1600s, British, English pastor.

It's a fantastic book and he lists if you want to you can just download this thing for a couple of bucks or put on your Kindle and even if you don't read the whole thing just read the list the table of contents and what he does there is he lists dozens and dozens of lies devices of Satan lies of Satan into those two categories of temptation and accusation.

I'll mention just a few. Here's a couple just on the temptation side of things.

Tactic of Satan he presents the bait but he hides the hook. In other words the lie he sells to your heart is the short term pleasures of sin and he hides the long term miserable consequences that flow from it.

[23:48] Another he paints sin with virtues colours. I'm not greedy I'm actually frugal.

It's not adultery it's exploring. nothing. It's not a lie it's just kind of like a half truth. Another one to present God to the soul as one made up all of money as if the only characteristic of God is that he is just love.

That's it. And that's his job. Doesn't matter if I sin. You know God's in the business of forgiveness that's what he said he would do.

And the worst case scenario I want to live life my way and then I'm going to ask for forgiveness on my deathbed. Get the best of both worlds.

It's a life here's a few on the accusation side. By causing them that is the Christian to keep dwelling on and thinking about sin to focus on their sins more than their saviour.

[25:18] Much more aware what the devil does is he ensures that the Christian takes ten looks at their sin to every look that they might take it their saviour.

And when they do they see him as righteous. Another one by making Christians think that the troubles they are going through must be punishments from God.

Again hiding God's sovereignty and his mercy and him walking with you and highlighting the fact that he's on your side should you not have a good life.

You're suffering this because you've done something wrong and God is punishing you. Another one. By persuading Christians that their situation is not good, their hearts are not sincere, their virtues are not genuine because they are so followed, vexed and tormented with temptations.

In other words, this Christian life is so hard and if I really was a Christian I would not clearly have those thoughts, I would not have these desires, I would not constantly failing.

[26:45] I'm an imposter. Another do any of those sound familiar to you at all? And depending on your disposition you'll hear one lie more than the other.

Depending on your disposition because Satan knows the absolute perfect lie for each one of us and if we ever get clued up he'll shift his tactics to tackle another one instead.

Come at us from another one instead. And so what it means is we need to know the enemy and we need to know which scheme he particularly what is his tactic that he specifically uses on me and be crafty enough to keep changing them as soon as you become aware of them.

And so we need to know how to fight. There's his weapons and strategies that's the war we're involved in. Verse 13 onwards is how the Christian fights this spiritual battle and I'm not going to unpack this in detail because you could.

One commentary I've got on these passages these nine verses even less than nine verses here all up when you take verses 10 to 20 is 1200 pages long.

[28:24] So we don't have time for that. So let me be brief. Therefore put on verse 13 put on the full armour of God so that when the day of evil comes you may be able to stand your ground and after you have done everything to stand stand firm then.

Paul is so conscious of the need for the Christian to stand in the battle. He wants us to be able to stand not falter not fall.

So notice the order verse 13 put on the armour so that you can stand when the day of evil comes or the time of special pressure.

In other words put on the armour first so that you are ready for the war. If you and I don't want to sound too light when I say this but if you were living in a war zone right now you don't wait for the bombs to start dropping before you build your bunker.

Do you? And the reason that I personally never ever built a bomb bunker is because I don't live in a war zone.

[29:54] never needed it. The point is if you do not think if you're a Christian and you are not aware consciously that there is a spiritual battle going on that life is going okay then your default position is to spiritually coast.

You're not fighting a battle. And then all of a sudden when the timer pressure hits and the flaming arrows of Satan start to descend what where did I put that shield?

What did I do with that thing? Ah it's over there in the fire pit. It is the fire pit. that's what happens and you're not able to stand.

And so when we spiritually coast and we're not aware of the spiritual battle where our prayer life is almost non-existent, we don't read or try to grow in our understanding of God's word, worship is not a high priority of the church, our involvement at church is light and we are certainly not working on the deep change in our lives that chapters 4 and 5 tell us to work at.

We're not taking off the old and putting on the new. We're coasting. And when the bombs start dropping it's too late because the armoring of the soul takes time.

[31:43] every single day is a testing ground. Most of us are not even aware from the moment we got up to the gathering right now we've already been involved in tens if not hundreds of skirmishes in our heart.

And so what happens when you're in a skirmish that you're not aware of? You lose. You lose.

That's what happens. Now we often attribute the big battles in life to spiritual warfare but fail to see the little skirmishes that are happening every day.

For instance have you ever thought go down the list in Ephesians 4 and 5 and pick one that's suitable for you but have you ever thought that impatience is spiritual battle?

Ever thought about that? When you got impatient with someone? It's a spiritual battle raging. in that moment for us is we've all got those people in our lives and the default instinct of the heart is idiots which is not just the default instinct of my heart but also the default thing that comes out of my mouth because what is in the heart comes out of their mouth when I'm in traffic.

[33:26] Idiots. Look at that idiot. I became aware of it personally when one of my children sitting in their car seat as a 4 year old noticed someone before I did in traffic and went idiot.

There you go your children teach you what goes on in your hearts. But the instinct of the heart is this person is getting in my way they're making my life difficult and what Satan is doing there in that moment is his poking poking look at that idiot.

You're absolutely right Steve you would not do that. There's no way you'd do that. There's no way you'd get in someone's way. No way you'd make that mistake. Your time is so much more important.

What if in that moment we saw it as a spiritual battle and instead change the voice of my heart. God as I'm reminded as my impatience comes and I'm reminded of this person in front of me God my impatience towards that person makes me wonder how you see me my faults my flaws my failings my sin God where would I be if you treated me like I'm currently treating that person right there do you do that instinctively see it as spiritual warfare in the shopping line in traffic at work do you do that instinctively in the heart not seeing any heads nodding let me just say I don't do it either and so I lose I lose another skirmish every single day we're afforded opportunities to hear the instinctive thoughts of our hearts to hear the lies that Satan is putting in there and to put on the armor of God and to push those lies out and change but if we're not aware that there is a battle raging we lose but friends this is routine spiritual warfare and he gives us our weapons and our strategies there are seven items in the armor and I'm going to be super brief

[36:39] I'm not going to try to condense 1200 pages if you like but I'll be super brief the belt of truth in verse 14 is the very first item and it's in fact the foundational principle it is in fact the foundational principle because the actual word there is not so much a belt like this that I've got on the outside of me holding my pants up the belt of truth was a leather undergarment that went under all of the armor that covered right down to the lowest end it's the undergarment a big thick leather chunk of stuff that covered all of you from and it's the foundational to stand firm in the battle you must be a person filled with the truth of the revelation of God in the scriptures with the gospel of the Lord

Jesus Christ at its center the truth of who Jesus is and what he's achieved for us Jesus is the way the truth and the life it is the belt of truth it is the foundation of the Christian life and everything else in here the breastplate of righteousness the shoes of peace the shield of faith the helmet of salvation if you go back into chapters one and two you'll see all of these things as benefits that flow from the gospel they're all privileges of the Christian and Paul is saying your very foundation of your life is the truth of the gospel the truth of God's self revelation in his word and what you need to do in take up the armor is you need to take up all the privileges that are yours in

Christ and remind yourself of them drill them into your heart and push out the lies of Satan every moment and how do we do that the last two items the sword of the spirit which is the word of God and praying the spirit these are two means provisions from God where we take up the benefits that we have in Christ where we're reminded of the truth of who we are in him of who God is and what he's achieved for us Bible and prayer Bible and prayer Bible and prayer the basic spiritual weapons of our warfare are Bible and prayer I've been saying it for five years at least and I'll keep saying it again and again and again how are you doing with that there is a reason why if you are not taking up the scriptures and praying into personal devotional life at least four times a week while you are not going anywhere in your spiritual life it's because you're losing the skirmishes a daily habit of taking up these offensive and defensive weapons how well are you doing are you doing it do you even know how to do it are you reflecting on it during the course of your day what is your personal prayer life like right now and secondly with that as well how are you going with spiritual friendship because none of us are able to stand on our own we must stand together spiritual friendships where we're encouraged to stand firm to be held accountable in the battle to be what is God teaching praying for each other and what is God teaching you how is he changing you a weekly habit at the very least of spiritual friendship and most likely daily when the time of special pressure comes and what about Bible and prayer on the level that we're doing right now how does that fit in to your weekly habits where we come under the authority of God's word we need each other we need the preaching of the word we need the sacraments which is a form of prayer and a

physical reminder of the truth of the gospel we need all of these things in order to stand together my last point as we fight this battle we need to know who's fought for us and continues to fight for us all this talk of spiritual warfare and armor can be a little bit unsettling and it certainly is in our day and age in the western world where you know the concept of

Christians battling evil in the world and slaying everything that's not Christian and you know that kind of stuff but it can also be unsettling because it's not what we expect of the Christian life we expect a life and you hear this you know go on YouTube watch sermons from certain areas of the Christian church it just talks about victory victory victory in your life not battle at all it's important for us to know the one who has fought for us and continues to fight for us in the middle of the battle as the war rages around us and in us we need to look to the one who continues to fight for us on the basis that he already has fought for us although our opponents are formidable they are nothing compared to our God in the

[43:21] Old Testament God is described as a divine warrior who fights against evil and injustice and so you see this in Exodus 15 verse 3 God has rescued his people Israel out of slavery in Egypt out of the grasp of slavery of the most formidable empire in the world at its time and then in Exodus 13 verse 3 in this song as they're on the other side of the Red Sea God is our warrior he is our warrior crucially though as you go through the Old Testament something else appears when it's

Israel doing the sin and the oppression God is a warrior against them and sends them back into exile and he destroys he uses their enemies to destroy them in other words what you see in the God of the Bible here is not a Christian nationalism at all you see a God who shows no favoritism he's against evil and injustice whoever perpetrates it that's what you see and so at the end of the Old Testament when God's people are in exile Israel are bemoaning the fact and they're under the rule of an oppressive empire and the prophets start looking forward to the day when God will become their divine warrior again and release them from slavery again and defeat their enemies again and

Daniel 7 mentions a divine warrior who will come with the angels and the armies of God to defeat all evil on the earth Daniel in his vision looks to the ancient of days God himself and says I will send the son of man hundreds of years later along comes Jesus and takes up the title the son of man and his followers in that moment are thinking finally you know talk about the armor of God look at all these Roman soldiers that are currently occupying us Jesus is going to come along look at him look at what Jesus can do Exodus 14 God divides the sea with wind and the waves and

Jesus calms the wind and the waves the divine warrior is here he's going to defeat the Romans he's going to set us free but he doesn't raise up an army to wound instead he heals and he forgives and he restores and he feeds and even when the Roman soldiers come to arrest him with all their armor and their swords he doesn't fight them you know Peter quick to act and slow to speak and slow to think I think Peter whips out his sword ready to fight for the cause of Jesus and defeat the Romans and Jesus says put it away have you not understood anything about me you see

Jesus is the divine warrior that we need and if Jesus had risen up in that moment following Peter's instruction and if he had defeated the Romans that's as far as the victory would go and it would mean absolutely nothing for the rest of us in human history but if he also came to pick up the sword in order to destroy all evil none of us would be left because evil is in the heart we're the problem I mean Jesus even said to Pilate don't you realize I could call down legions of angels right now they are at my disposal right now you have no control or power over me at all he could have saved himself but instead of taking up a sword in his hand he surrendered those hands to nails he bared he if you like bore the sword of

[48:50] God's judgment on all evil he overcame evil with good he saves his enemies by loving and forgiving and dying for his enemies and can you see the war that's going on every time we coast every time we coast and we allow impatience and we coast and we allow anger and we coast and we allow hate and we coast and we allow bitterness and we coast and we allow resentment and envy and greed and selfishness to go unchecked in the heart do you see that we're destroying the work of Christ in our hearts do you see that we're taking the tarnish of God's trophy and

Satan wins when we coast and not just that our neighbours are condemned to hell because there's nothing attractive about us and Satan loves it and Satan loves it and he's going to to him to have to him!
to