

Eph 6:18b-20

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: 30 April 2017

Preacher: Evan Parke

[0:00] The scripture passage we're reading today is taken from Ephesians 6. We're doing verse 18b, but I'm going to read the entire of 18.

Verse 20, which is page 979 in your pew Bible. Sorry. So we're dealing with warfare.

We have been dealing with warfare, spiritual warfare. Warfare is engagement in or the activities involved in a war or conflict.

There are different types of warfare. There's a natural warfare, and here in the text we are encountering and learning about the reality of spiritual warfare.

And we are told here about what is necessary or what our strategy should be to fight and to be victorious in a spiritual war.

[1:05] In fact, the natural wars that we are seeing take place on the battlefields around our world or in the hearts and minds of humanity and in our own hearts and minds, because we too are a part of humanity, are flesh and blood wars.

These wars that can be seen and even felt viscerally. But here in the text we are told that even such wars are not the fights that we need to be distracted by.

Because the origin of our very own flesh and blood conflict, both in our beings and in the outside world, originates from a spiritual war that is raging in full effect.

A friend in Los Angeles once pointed out when we were just theologically reflecting about what we observed was going on in the madness of our world.

She said to me, she said, Evan, what you don't see is what's real. That's what she said. She said, what you don't see is what's real. So if what we don't see is what's real, then somehow it behooves us or it is in our best interest to engage in this spiritual battle with a very real enemy who's not visible to us, although we are told that we can recognize his schemes.

[2:28] But even though he's not visible to us, we're facing a very real enemy and we have to engage this enemy in a very unique way.

In fact, before we talk about the strategy outlined in Ephesians, we should be reminded and embrace the very real fact that this enemy is not only real, but this enemy is fully committed to our destruction.

Fully committed. In fact, the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 5 points this out quite vividly when he warns us that our adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

So our enemy's ultimate goal is not just to irritate us or to get on our nerves or to make us sad or even oppressed. He's ultimately trying to destroy us.

His enemy, Satan, and the forces of darkness is ultimately trying to destroy us. Now, knowing that we are in a spiritual war and knowing that the nature and the objective of the enemy we are facing, we have to understand why this instruction to pray or communicate with heaven in this warfare context is so important.

[3:50] Here's an illustration that may help. I've never been a foot soldier. I'm sure some people here have been in the military, but one of my best friends and one of my favorite cousins have been.

Everybody has a favorite cousin. We used to beat them up when they were kids. This is that cousin. But they were both, and they were both, and one is still in the Marine, Marine grunts.

They're a Marine infantryman. And I'm a bit of a bootleg war historian, too, because I've always found the psychology of human conflict interesting and also some of the strategy.

If you know anything, for example, about the American Civil War, what was considered one of the most pivotal battles in that war was the Battle of Gettysburg. That took place in July 1863, and it was so pivotal that if the North would have lost that battle, then I would most likely be at Yale Divinity School on a student visa from Canada or the UK.

Now, there was a battle within that battle that occurred on the second day in the Battle of Gettysburg, which was a three-day battle. And that battle, many historians believe, was the most significant, smaller battle within this larger Battle of Gettysburg.

[5:10] It took place around a hilltop situated at the Union Army's extreme left flank called Little Round Top. Geographic importance of Little Round Top was there because of where it was situated on the battlefield.

Now, whoever controlled that ground could dominate the countryside for miles. But this hill represented the most vulnerable flank of the Union lines. So losing that position would be disastrous.

But along with its geographic location, it was equally important to point out that it was on a hill or a high ground. It was strategic not only because of its location, but more so because of how it sat in that location.

I understand, and this is from my best friend, mostly, I'm sure my cousin would concur, that in warfare, having the high ground gives you a significant advantage.

And although in modern warfare, air power can neutralize the advantage of high ground, it is still better to have the high ground. Because the high ground gives you perspective or a point of view that puts you at the advantage over the enemy.

[6:34] So when we pray, as the essential element of spiritual warfare, we need to not only remember that our God rules the high ground and sits on the highest ground in this war where our enemy is not flesh and blood, but that our God also owns the high ground on which he sits.

And therefore, has a point of view or the perspective that will give us the victory when we have to engage the enemy and discern his destructive schemes.

So now that we find ourselves in warfare, we pray to get instructions for the fight. And then God begins to download his point of view from the high ground.

And here in Ephesians, the first thing we are told to do actually in this passage of Scripture is keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, or praying for all the saints.

Let's look at that first half of this verse. In the military, in the infantry in particular, both officers and enlisted, whether it's the army or the Marines, you are taught that you need to fight for the man next to you, or even the woman next to you, depending on the country you're from, because some women are in combat, like with the men.

[8:06] I know that happens in the Middle East. But you have to fight for the man next to you, the one who's standing beside you. There's no one else that you need to worry about in that moment of battle, because your brother or sister in the fight is the one who truly matters in that moment of life and death realities.

Also, while you are preparing for the fight, or in the fight, when you are in the field, you're often facing or experiencing sleep deprivation, or extreme fatigue.

I understand that this is a daily reality of the infantrymen, when they are in the field, and being alert, which includes not snoring when you do sleep. In spite of how you may feel, you have to be alert, no matter how you may feel, but it's something that basically, your life and the life of those who fight beside you are dependent upon.

Now, when a soldier is in a battle, one thing's always certain, or is on the battlefield, this is always certain, that an ever-present threat exists. Even if there's downtime, or they may be back, they may be back at the base camp, or playing basketball, or flag football, or card games, what often will underlie their thoughts, even in their moments of rest and relaxation, is that there is an enemy out there whose objective is hell-bent on destroying them.

In other words, impending danger is always lurking, so being alert has to become a discipline. It has to become a discipline, and this requires all perseverance. Perseverance implies steadfastness, tenacity, or staying power.

[9 : 45] So the implication here is that staying alert takes effort. Staying alert in warfare requires us to also be honest about what is going on around us, and even in us, so that we can be more effective for the fight.

I suggest that one way of staying alert is being committed when we pray of first taking a spiritual inventory of our own lives before the Lord, just telling the truth to God because God already knows us, and allowing the Holy Spirit to do the work in us to help us grow toward wholeness and maturity, to help us where we cannot help ourselves, and therefore become more effective soldiers for God's kingdom.

Staying alert involves us not only looking for the attack of the enemy from the outside, but allowing God to give us victory over the enemy and the challenges of our flesh on the inside.

Paul writes in Romans 7, 18-21, for I know that nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh, but I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out, for I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close in hand.

[11 : 28] Saints, we are perpetually, sorry, fighting a battle on the inside, and we need the healing and gracious power of the Holy Spirit to lead us into victory on a daily basis in that battle, yet we also face the enemy on the outside.

And so does everyone else whom we know and who we do not know who follows Jesus Christ. And we not only need to pray for ourselves then, but we need to pray for them, for all the other saints, all around the world.

And when Hebrew says all, in Greek and in Hebrew, all means all. Why is this necessary? Because when we pray to the God of the high ground, that God sees or has a perspective that prioritizes community.

Here's what I mean. Ephesians 3 gives us a clear, clearer, a clue earlier when it declares that for this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that the past is knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

All the fullness of God. God loves us. And we are able to grasp a broader sense of that fullness of what the love of God is through community.

[13:19] For instance, I don't know what the love of God looks like in the context of surviving or combating cancer. I have friends that do. But I do know what the love of God looks like when you have to walk loved ones through terminal illness or face never-ending financial crisis, wanting to work and you can't get arrested for a job.

I know what the love of God looks like in those contexts. I don't know what the love of God looks like when you have to live with chronic illness. But I know saints who do.

I don't know what the love of God looks like when you have to serve hard time in prison for a bad decision. But I know people who do. So the fullness of God's love is such that there are so many dimensions that in order to grasp some measure of it beyond our own experience, you and I need to be in community.

And this makes the health and safety of this community a priority of prayer and warfare. prayer. Because God is continuously pouring out expressions of his loving kindness in this community.

So we must pray for all the saints. Second, prayer gives us the courage we need to do our kingdom job well.

[14:45] Prayer gives us the courage we need to do our kingdom job well. We already know that we are in a war, a fight. And a fight, and in a fight, we need courage.

Even if we think we got some courage. If we're honest, we can admit to times in our lives where our courage has faltered. And we're not even referring to spiritual warfare per se.

Just basic courage we need to have even hard conversations that need to be had. But here it's interesting that Paul in the context of spiritual war is asking that prayer be offered up so that he will first know what to say in relation to the mystery of the gospel.

And that once he knows what to say that he will say it with courage. Now Paul was a communicator. He was a leader but in a but an additional gift that he possessed was his ability to communicate clearly and to argue or reason when presenting the gospel to those outside of the faith.

We see a number of instances of this not only in his writing but we see it in actions being described to us that he does. For example, it can be pointed out in Acts 17, 16 through 34 when he's speaking to the men of Athens.

[16:08] First he's reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and devout persons and then he's out in the street with the philosophers who love to philosophize as scripture points out and then it as scripture points out and then it culminates with his sermon on Mars Hill or Mars Hill.

I'm going to strip over the Greek word of it beyond that word of it but it's Mars Hill it's also called Mars Hill where he contends for God who these Athenians sought to label as the unknown God.

He proclaims, he proclaims that this God is truly the God who made the world and everything in it. So Paul was a proclaimer. Now using military terms since we are dealing with warfare, proclaiming in the context of leadership which was his MOS or his military occupational specialty.

In the military, the military, the MOS is one's job description basically. If there's a war or battle then everyone is counting on you to do your job. The job, that job and to do it with a reasonable degree of proficiency and definitely courage in order to bring about the victory for your unit, your military force, your country or the kingdom that you've pledged your allegiance to.

Interesting that although Paul was gifted, a gifted and brilliant communicator, we see his humility and his dependence on God here because he did not say, hey, this is what I want to say.

[17:42] No, he wanted to know what the God of the high ground wanted him to say in order that the mystery of the gospel be communicated and done so with effectiveness.

You see, God knew the proper context in which Paul needed to speak. God was intimately familiar with the audience of Paul's message whenever or wherever he would find himself delivering it.

It is believed that the context in which he was to speak was one where he had to defend this new faith before Nero, the Caesar in Rome, to allay any suspicion that Christianity was a threat to the empire as some new Jewish sect or heretical group as far as many of their fellow Jews had categorized them, but instead, it was a new community of both Jews and Gentiles.

Paul wanted to be clear in his message given the subject matter and bold given the audience and what could have been at stake when declaring that Christ had, when declaring what Christ had done in merging Jews and Gentiles into this new humanity.

And how was it this mystery was also good news for all? Boldness was also required because, as he points out in verse 19, he was in chains.

[19:04] He was a prisoner. He needed courage in this battle from the God of the high ground. Similarly, similarly, God knows the context of our battles individually and as a community.

our battles are always couched in specific contexts. You and I cannot always fight every spiritual battle the same because the next battle may be surrounded by totally different contexts.

For instance, when Winston Churchill made his famous speech in the House of Commons in World War II, it wasn't World War II for us yet, but it was World War II going on, June 4, 1940, when the United Kingdom was under assault from Nazi Germany's Blitzkrieg or lightning war from the air, he sought to encourage the people of the UK to persevere when he declared we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and on the oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air.

He goes on to say we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills, we shall never surrender. Now what Churchill understood about warfare is that battles have different contextual frameworks that require the proper equipment, intelligence, training, and personnel who are operating in their military occupational specialty with a strong degree of competency and in unity with one another in order to be victorious.

In spiritual warfare, each of us has a spiritual MOS as it were, military occupational specialty. And even though we may be familiar with our gifting to the point where we think we know what the specific battle requires, the example being given here should encourage us to seek God's instruction in prayer.

[21:06] in spite of what we think we know and doing so, we'll be doing, think we know and doing so, we'll be better positioned to discern when we pray to defer in the context of our battles because the God of the high ground knows what we need from him in order to win.

finally prayer is necessary not only because we are soldiers in a fight but we are also ambassadors with a message.

We are soldiers in a fight but we are also ambassadors with a message. Paul describes himself here as an ambassador.

2 Corinthians 5.20 when he addresses the Corinthian church he declares we are ambassadors of Christ. Then he tells us that as ambassadors God is making his appeal through us.

How does this work? This appeal thing or this ambassador thing. Now ambassadors in our modern context are diplomats.

[22 : 24] These diplomats are envoys or persons designated to represent one government in its dealings with another. Now they are typically four central duties of ambassadors when we think about them in a modern sense.

These duties are representation policy protecting citizens and management. And management typically happens at the embassy where the diplomat is assigned. However for the sake of what we're seeing in this text I want to look at two of the duties.

The duty of representation and the duty of policy. First who do we represent? We are ambassadors. Scripture tells us that we are ambassadors for Christ just like Paul.

It says Paul is in chains which is not necessarily the image or the context we imagine when we think of ambassadors because being an ambassador should carry a more polished image. But maybe the point is that the context of our battle or the framework of our fight does not change the role that we are given as Christ's ambassadors.

And in our representation of Christ we are representing God's kingdom and God's kingdom quoting Dr. Tony Evans originates from God's realm which is spiritual.

[23 : 43] He goes on to clarify when he says he does not deny that the whole universe constitute the realm of God's kingdom which means that God's kingdom is all embracing or it is God's comprehensive rule of all creation.

It is just that the origin of God's kingdom is from above not from the earth. So we are representatives of a heavenly kingdom here on earth and here on earth and it is something that we can never relinquish or get away from and need to always be mindful of.

Now I don't say this to put pressure on you and myself. It's just reality of the situation. But I want to encourage you by saying that God gives us grace to do our duty in spite of ourselves.

Please remember there is grace that abounds in Christ. And I cannot emphasize enough how incredibly kind God's grace is in relation to humanity but particularly to his church.

1 John 3 declares so see what love the father has given us that we shall be called children of God. And then he writes and that is what we are.

[24 : 58] So we are representatives for Christ and God's kingdom but our duty is also to convey the policy of the kingdom. Now in order to carry out policy aptly defined as a deliberate system of principles to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes the ambassador has to consult with the president the head of state or the sovereign about what the policy is.

So as ambassadors of Christ we receive our policy and directives in the midst of the battle from the Lord God from the God of the high ground. In other words even in the midst of our roles as soldiers fighting the enemy through prayer we are also able to receive instructions from God who rules the high ground on how to carry out kingdom policy as his ambassadors.

As soldiers we fight against the forces of the enemy of our souls but as ambassadors with a message God is making an appeal through us to the world. Now this message is one of reconciliation and this is reconciliation that begins with salvation.

Theologian Paul Fidesz when speaking of one dimension of how God's salvation works he writes in our world in our world how God's salvation works in our world I'm sorry he writes that God acts to heal and reconcile entering a great cost into the disruption of human lives in order to share our predicament and release us from it.

God embraces us as fragile humanity he embraces us he embraces us in our predicament through Christ Jesus and we carry that message of reconciliation to the world as his ambassadors.

[27:09] It is kingdom policy that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. Let us by God's grace continually look to God to the God of the high ground in prayer with the goal to be bold effective ambassadors of that message of reconciliation and bold effective soldiers fighting the forces of the enemy of our souls who seek to distort that message.

Prayer in the context of spiritual warfare is what will give us perspective that we need but it also provides us with the strength we need for the fight.

God bless you. God bless you.