

## **The Battle and the Armor**

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June 3, 2018

Ephesians 6:10-20

On December 7, 1941 at 7:05am, the Imperial Japanese Navy launched what would become one of the most successful attacks in all of WWII. As soon as you heard that date, December 7<sup>th</sup>, you probably knew the name of the place they attacked - the Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Make no mistake - it was a lopsided victory for Japan and a huge blow to our military. We lost in that battle over 2,400 men, 18 ships and 6 airstrips. Almost all the planes, over 300, that were stationed there were damaged or destroyed before they could even take off to fight. It was a lopsided victory for Japan, a lopsided defeat for us.

There was one factor that enabled Japan to deal such a crushing blow. We might call that factor "surprise," but the truth is it goes way beyond just normal surprise. Not only were the people at Pearl Harbor, both civilian and military, not prepared to respond to the Japanese attack. Not only did they have no warning that the Japanese were coming, but the thing that made this engagement so successful for our enemies was this: the people at Pearl Harbor didn't even think they were at war. Because no declaration of war had been made, they thought they were living on an island paradise, not a battlefield. They thought they were in a safe zone, not a combat zone.

The illusion of safety was so complete that one civilian explained that he thought the shelling of the harbor was a US navy exercise until his house exploded. It was so complete that when US intelligence intercepted Japanese messages on Saturday December 6 asking about the placement of US Assets in Pearl Harbor, they decided not to look into it until Monday. The illusion was so complete that when a US soldier saw the hundreds of Japanese planes coming on radar, his commanding lieutenant figured they must be American planes coming from California and spoke the four words that sealed the fate of 2,400 people. He said "Don't worry about it." Then the Japanese came and 2,400 people died, all because they thought they were in a place of peace and not on a battlefield.

If you are a Christian today, if you have placed your trust in Christ, I need to tell you something: You live on a battlefield. Whether you know it or not, whether you like it or not, whether you say it or not, you are at war. Whether you're worked up about it or whether, like that lieutenant, you are saying "Don't worry about it," if you are a Christian, you are in a battle. Just like at Pearl Harbor, understanding that we live on a battlefield can make all the difference between safety and danger, between victory and defeat. It's crucial that we understand the battle we are in.

For this reason, Paul closes his letter to the Ephesians with an extended explanation of the battle that we are engaged in as Christians and of the armor God has given us to protect us. Let me invite you to turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 6:10-20. This is the last passage in our study of Ephesians. This is a well-known passage about the Christian's armor. Over the next few weeks, we are going to look at it in detail. We are going to look at the things we put on, like belts of truth and gospel shoes, and breastplates of righteousness, and helmets of salvation. We are going to look at things

we take up, like shields and swords. Today we are going to start our study of this passage where Paul starts with an introduction to the battle. Today we will take a long look at the battle we are engaged in and a short overview of our armor.

Let's read Ephesians 6:10-20. If you are a Christian, wherever you live, whatever you do, whether you are young or old, whether you are a strong Christian or a weak Christian, whether you are a corporate bigwig or a home-maker or a college student, Paul writes these words for you. Listen closely to what he says:

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor 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 powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor 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, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 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.*

*Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

*- Ephesians 6:10-20*

Perry Creek, my goal today is that you would become truly aware of the battle that you are in, a battle that's much bigger than you or me, that you would come to understand more clearly the mission that God has given you and the goal of the enemy, and the means by which we arm ourselves. I pray that you would understand that, so that each of you can take your part and hold your ground and live for something bigger than yourself, so that you can live out God's purpose in your life.

We are going to start today by talking about this battle, this great war, that we are engaged in. Let me give you four facts about this battle, four truths that you need to understand that can really revolutionize the way you look at your Christian life. I would encourage you today to take notes as we look at these things, so that you can look back on this and reflect on it during the week and in your small groups. Let's look at these. The first fact that you have to know about the battle is this:

## The Enemy Is Powerful

Look at what Paul says in verse 12. He tells us to put on the full armor of God, and then he tells us why:

*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.*

Listen our enemy is powerful! Look at the words Paul uses here: rulers, authorities, powers, spiritual forces. These are words of power. They suggest organization. We don't fully understand that, but here and in other places it would seem that Satan is very organized in his approach, that just as there are different classes of angels with different jobs, there are different classes of fallen angels or demons, and they that they have different jobs. We face an organized foe.

And a powerful foe. Listen to the words that the Bible uses to describe our enemy. In Ephesians, he is called "the Prince of the power of the air." In Corinthians, he is called "the god of this world." John tells us that. Listen to this "The whole world, meaning the world system of power and possessions and government, is under the control of the evil one."

If you know the story of the gospels, Matt, Mark and Luke, all tell us that early in his ministry, Jesus was driven into the wilderness and tempted by our enemy. Luke tells us something interesting. In one of those temptations, Satan takes Jesus up to a high mountain and shows him the kingdoms of the world. Does anyone remember what he said? He said "If you bow down and worship me, I will give you the authority to rule all of these for they are mine and I can give them to whomever I choose." And Jesus didn't disagree with Satan about that.

We face a powerful foe way beyond our power to resist alone. There are places in this world where that power and this spiritual warfare is more obvious you can actually feel it. I've had more than one missionary tell me that there are parts of Asia where they could actually feel the spiritual heaviness. I know of one missionary who went to that place. While he was there, he was driving a motor scooter. He felt a force pushing him toward a concrete barricade. He did everything that he could to resist it, but in the end, it pushed him into that barricade and it nearly killed his wife. His son saw the whole thing happen.

Listen, there are places like that. There are places in Zimbabwe where people live in total fear of the spiritual realm. Kelley and I have seen things there and here. Kelley had one experience, that I won't talk about, but she wondered "Did that really happen? Did I really experience what I thought I experienced?" We didn't tell anyone about it, but then my Mom sent us some CD's she said we should listen to about spiritual warfare. This other pastor a very normal, rational pastor described an experience he had. It was the same experience word for word. Listen, there are places in the world where the enemy's power is on open display. Some of you know this.

Ephesus, the place this letter was written to, was one of those places. It was the center of magic in the Roman empire. It was associated with magic and sorcery so strongly that in Greek the term

“Ephesian Letter” was a technical term for a magical incantation. Acts tells us that when the Ephesians became Christians, they burned books of magical spells worth 50,000 days wages. Crazy things happened while Paul was in Ephesus, just read Acts 11! This is why Paul writes to them about the armor of God. They knew that they didn’t just wrestle against flesh and blood.

So listen, sometimes you can feel , and see it. Some of you know this. Sometimes you can’t. Sometimes, it fits the enemy’s strategy to stay quiet and invisible and put us to sleep. The French poet Charles Baudelaire said “The greatest trick that the Devil ever pulled off was convincing people that he didn’t exist.” But our enemy is powerful, whether we feel it or not. So we need to know the enemy is powerful. Secondly, we need to know this:

## The Ground is Contested

The ground on which we live, the ground on which you work, this ground right here in this school, is contested. It's a battlefield between good and evil. Despite the fact that Satan is called the god of this world, it's not just the case that he has authority here and that there's nothing that can be done about it. That's not the way it is at all. In fact, despite all that power Satan is a defeated foe. He lost at the cross. Listen to what Colossians 2 says:

*God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities (notice those are 2 of our words), he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*

- Colossians 2:13-15

Satan was defeated when Jesus died and rose again. Paul also stated this earlier in Ephesians. I don't know if you remember it, but in chapter 1 he said this:

*God raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*

- Eph. 1:20-21

Did you notice that, once again, those are the same words that Paul uses in our passage: "rulers, authorities, powers." What he's saying is that Christ has won the victory! The real, war the eternal war the war between good and evil, was settled for good when Jesus died on the cross. He paid to redeem humanity and the earth and to restore God's dominion. In the most important sense, the war is over.

So then why is Paul telling us that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world? Why would he say that? Because our enemy is still fighting. Yes, he's defeated, but he's not giving up. He's wrecking as much of creation as he can on his way down.

I'm reminded of a book I just finished reading called "the Pacific." It's an account of the US Marine Corps and their battle against the Imperial Japanese Army. As I read it, I learned that one of the most frustrating and damaging things that our Marines faced in those fierce, bloody conflicts was that the Japanese would never quit fighting. Even when they knew they had lost, even when they knew there was no hope of holding their ground, they would lay traps and play dead or make a suicide charge to shoot someone. Their goal was to kill as many Americans as possible. It was mind-boggling to our Marines to see the senseless violence that that caused to the Japanese themselves and to us when they had already lost. They found out later that the Japanese government had told their soldiers even when they knew they were defeated that the more Americans they killed, the better their position would be when they negotiated final terms.

Listen, that's like our enemy. He's defeated, but he either doesn't believe it or he doesn't care. He's still fighting. He's bent on destruction. God created this earth. Satan led a rebellion in which he became the ruler of it. He was defeated at the cross, but he's still fighting for every inch of ground. The enemy is powerful, and the ground is contested. As a result of that, it's important that we understand fact 3 about the battle:

## The Goal Is To Stand

If you've been with us through Ephesians, this may seem a little bit counter-intuitive, because all through Ephesians (especially in the last 2 chapters), Paul has been talking from the standpoint of the events of our individual lives. His word has always been "walk," right? Remember, we did a series on Ephesians 4 called "Walk This Way," and all through Ephesians 4,5, and 6 Paul has been telling us how to walk, walk in good works, walk worthy of our calling, walk not as Pagans walk, walk in love, walk in light, walk in wisdom. Eight times, Paul has told us how to walk.

But now as Paul shifts from our individual lives to the bigger picture of the war, that all changes. Now it's "stand." Verse 11 - "Take your stand against the Devil's schemes." Verse 13 - "Put on the full armor, so that you may be able to stand your ground." Again verse 13 - "And after you have done everything to stand." Verse 14 - "Stand firm then." The goal is to stand. Listen to me church, you don't have to go out to India or to Africa to find the battle. The battle is already around you. And your job is to stand. Your job is to dig in, to get busy establishing a base of operations. You are to establish what our Armed forces in WWII called "a beachhead." If you've seen the movie "Saving Private Ryan," you get the idea. The Marines or Army would go in land on a beach and hold that little piece of ground, often at great cost. Their goal was to establish a base of operations, a foothold from which our troops could advance.

Listen church, that's what Paul is saying, that's why he says to stand. Your job, every one of you, is not to see how comfortable you can be. It is to live for a purpose larger than yourself. Your job is to establish in your family, Jim, in your marriage, Marc, at your job, Allison, in your school, Jane, at this school, Kelley, at your neighborhood, Ukay, a beachhead. You are to be a presence from which the Spirit of Christ can work to build his Kingdom. You are to hold that ground, to live as light, so that your spouse, your children, your co-workers, your classmates, your neighbors can find Jesus and grow. That's your job. That's where your attention should go. Establish a foothold for the kingdom and hold your ground.

Can I just say something? It's happening right here at Perry Creek. I'm watching it happen. I'm seeing families where God gets hold of someone's heart and he begins reaching in one member at a time, and the kingdom grows there! I'm seeing ways in which God is starting to reach this school. Families that are starting to come, teachers that are inviting us to pray. I'm seeing some of the neighborhoods that you guys live in where the leaven of God's kingdom is growing. I'm seeing co-workers invited to Jesus. It's happening right here. It's happening. You guys are doing it. You're holding your ground. Our job is to make a stand. OK, but listen you have to know this, because our goal is to stand.

## **Our Enemy's Goal Is To Take Us Out of the Contest**

Christian, hear me. Please listen to me carefully, because this is so important. Once you become a Christian, once you change sides in this battle and become a soldier of the King, what Satan wants is to take you out of the battle. If he can't have you, he wants your influence removed. He wants you sitting on the sidelines and out of the game.

That's what he really wants! If he can destroy you, if he can hurt you, so much the better. But what he really wants is you out of the fight, not working to establish God's Kingdom, not thinking about how you can bring light to the darkness, not standing, sitting on the sideline. That is what your enemy wants.

It only makes sense. That's how it is in a conventional war, right? Nations don't go to war just to harm or kill soldiers. They go to war to accomplish objectives. They harm or kill soldiers, because soldiers stand in the way. The harm is just a way of taking the soldiers out of the equation. That's how it is with our enemy. What he really wants is you out of the equation, so he can re-take the ground where you live.

Listen to me believer: He has a thousand ways to get that done. Some of you are experiencing his tactics right now. He has pulled you out of the game or he's pulling hard to try and get you out. That's his scheme, and he has a thousand ways of doing it. He will use temptation if that works. How many ministers of the gospel are sitting on the sidelines because of moral failure? The enemy has them right where he wants them out of the fight! He will use discouragement to sideline you, if he can. It's one of his favorites! He will use conflict, if that can distract you and get your head out of the battle. If that doesn't work, he'll use sickness or shame or addiction or hobbies or the riches of this world. The enemy will use whatever it takes to get your head out of the game and to distract you so that you desert your post.

He'll use busy-ness. I remember when Bob Conner told his story here, he said "If the devil can't make you bad, he'll make you busy!" Let me say, that is so true! How many Dads have been sidelined from influencing their family for Christ, because they were just too busy?

So be careful! That's exactly what our enemy wants. Dads, our enemy would like nothing better than for you to give up ground in your family and wake up when your child is 20 years old and say "Where have I been?" Wives, he would like nothing better than for you to wake up and say "Where is God in my marriage? How it become so distant?" Christians, he would like nothing more than for you to wake up one day with a big pile of money or prestige or experiences having done nothing for his kingdom. Our enemy wants us out of the contest and he has a thousand ways of doing it.

So, we face a powerful enemy on contested ground whose goal is to take us out of the contest. That's the battle, and if that was the end of the story this would be a pretty bleak sermon!

But that's not where the story ends, that's not where Ephesians ends, and that's not where I want us to end today. Let me give you a little bit more, so that you can be thinking about this and turning it over in your mind. The good news is that we are not simply left in that situation trying to stand against that foe in our own strength. God has given us resources to help us, as we make our stand. We obviously have the Holy Spirit. We have God's Word, and we have each other. But we also have something very important. We have:

The Armor: We have armor and weapons that our enemy cannot undo. I mean listen to what Paul says about our armor and weapons:

*For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh (remember in our passage, he says we wrestle not against flesh and blood right?). For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.  
- 2 Corinthians 10: 3-5*

We have powerful weapons and armor, weapons and armor that are more powerful than the weapons of the enemy. In our passage, Ephesians 6, Paul lists for us six pieces of armament that God has provided for his people:

1. The belt of truth
2. The breastplate of righteousness
3. Shoes of the readiness of the gospel of peace
4. The shield of faith
5. The helmet of salvation
6. The sword of the Spirit.

Weapons that cover us from head to toe and are exactly what we need in order to hold our ground. Over the next few weeks, we will be discussing that armor in detail but let me close today by giving you two pieces of information about that armor and an example.

### **1. The armor is both something you receive and something you do.**

For years, I wondered as I read this passage is the armor in this passage objective? Is it something you receive, like is the belt of truth, God's Truth that we receive about him? Is the breastplate of righteousness, the right-standing the righteous status that we receive from God through Christ? Is the armor objective?

Or is the armor subjective? is it something we actively do? Is the belt of truth the belt of truthfulness? is it us speaking the truth? Is the breastplate of righteousness the breastplate of us doing what is right?

Each one of these pieces can be taken either way: Is the shield of faith "the Faith" that we have received? Or is it our faith believing in God's goodness? Is the helmet the salvation we will receive? Or is it the hoping in salvation that we do? These things could be taken either way and I

wondered which it was Until finally one day I realized it's both. It's both objective and subjective. The armor is both something we receive and something we do. And the objective (what we receive from God) is the basis for the subjective (what we do for God). Now we will look at that in more detail in the next few weeks but I wanted to kind of put that in your mind so that as you think about the armor this week, and talk about it in your small groups s you can be chewing on that!

So the armor is both something we receive and something we do.

## **2. We put our armor on by praying**

It's possible that we might read this passage and say "That's great! So we have all this awesome battle-gear! Belts and breastplates, shoes and shields and swords, but how on earth do I know if I have my armor on?"

Well, Paul gives us a subtle hint about how to put our armor on in the final verses of this passage. He has already told us our job is to stand. He has already told us about the armor and listed it in detail He's just finished with the Sword of the Spirit. Now look what he says next:

*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. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should (*  
- Eph. 6:18-20

How do you put on this armor that is not fleshly, but spiritual? You pray. He says it five time there. Pray. Say prayers. Keep on praying. Pray for me. Pray that I may declare the gospel fearlessly. We put our armor on by praying it on, one piece at a time. How do we stand our ground and bring light to the darkness against this powerful enemy who wants to get us out of the battle? We pray. We live on our knees. We pray for ourselves and for our brothers and sisters. We pray our armor on.

It's something I've been doing for years. Every Saturday night I pray my armor on. So I thought we would close our sermon today by doing something that's a little bit unusual. I'm going to ask Chris Helmeniak to come have a seat right here. He volunteered yesterday without knowing what I was going to do, never a good idea! Some of you have been praying for Chris, as he's been looking for a job. Well, the Lord provided generously. Chris has landed a good job and training starts next week. So just so that you get a feel for what this is like and because we care for our brother, Chris, we are going to pray Chris' armor on.