

**YOU ARE A WARRIOR****EPHESIANS 6:10-24**

One of the strangest stories to come out of World War 2 involved the mystery of two young men captured by American soldiers in Germany near the end of the war. The two were shipped to a prisoner of war camp in this country. They kept to themselves and refused to talk to anyone – even their fellow German prisoners. In fact, the other German prisoners insisted that they knew nothing about the pair either. When they finally did speak, no one could understand a word they said. Oddly enough, they certainly didn't look German. Their features were Asian. Soon the mystery was solved. The two men turned out to be Tibetans! When someone who knew the Tibetan language was finally located and spoke with them, they were overjoyed.

They told an incredible, almost unbelievable story. In the summer of 1941, these two men, lured by a desire to see something of the outside world beyond their tiny Tibetan village, crossed the northern border of Tibet and began to wander around happily in what was then the Soviet Union. They were picked up by Soviet authorities by mistake, put on a train with hundreds of other men, shipped west to a large army camp, issued uniforms and rifles, given some basic military training and sent to fight at the Russian front. They were horrified by what they saw. Being good Buddhists, killing was against their religion. They took off, but were overtaken by the Germans, made prisoners, shipped to Germany and eventually forced to join the German Army. Once again they took off, but this time they were captured by the Americans. When they had finished their story, the interpreter asked them if they had any questions. Only one: "Why are all these people trying to kill each other?"

It's kind of amusing and incredible that anyone could be that out of touch and that ignorant of a war that had enveloped most of the world. But there's another war going on at this very moment that makes World War 2 look like a spat between preschoolers in comparison. And what is surely incredible is that most people – even many Christians - are ignorant of it. What war? It's the war between two kingdoms – the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan for the hearts, minds and souls of human beings. It's a war that's been going on now for thousands of years. Today we conclude a three month study of Paul's letter to several churches in and around the city of Ephesus in the middle of the first century. I hope you've learned new truths or been reminded of well-known truths in a fresh way. I know I have! We've observed that in Ephesians we discover who we are in Christ. Our new identity is revealed to us. Each of us is a child of the one, true King – valued, loved and chosen by God, called to a wonderful mission in this world, and assured of a glorious eternity in Heaven. It's fascinating to me that Paul concludes this magnificent letter by underlining yet another aspect of your identity and mine. You are a warrior. You may have never served in the military, but you are a soldier – a warrior – nonetheless. Among other great truths in these verses, we learn here first of all that...

**YOU ARE IN A REAL WAR**

Any rational person recognizes that there's a whole lot wrong with this world. But for many people, the belief than an evil, supernatural being called Satan and demonic spirits under his leadership are the ultimate force behind all the evil and misery out there sounds hopelessly irrelevant and superstitious. Many of them deny the supernatural – either good or evil. Many of them believe that all the world's problems can be solved by education or by appealing to logic. For example, our country has had a problem with the misuse of drugs for decades now. The kind of drugs change, but the problem remains the same. What solutions have been offered? If you just educate people, if you just throw more money at more treatment, if you throw enough people in jail, if you just seal off the borders, then the problem will be solved! The fact is that our drug epidemic – like so many of our other unsolvable problems - has been masterminded in Hell. It's evidence of a very real war that you can't see with your physical eyes.

We will never understand the problems in the world today – all the evil, chaos and confusion despite all of our scientific and technological advances – or why we get so defeated and discouraged in our own daily lives until we take very seriously what the Bible says here – we are in a very real war – not with other human beings but with evil, supernatural forces. You might see that as yet another reason to be depressed. "Rick, I come to church to receive comfort and encouragement for my life. All this about fighting against evil, dark rulers, authorities and supernatural powers is frightening and discouraging. I don't want to fight anyone. I just need some peace and contentment." May I suggest to you and me that what's truly depressing is to be confronted by a situation we don't understand, to be up against an enemy we don't recognize, and to experience endless cycles of personal defeat with no hope of victory. God is explaining here what's going on, and more importantly, how we can find power and victory.

You're in a very real war. Satan isn't so much against you as he is against God. We're no threat to the devil in ourselves, but because we are now children of the one, true King we have become Satan's target. Ever since he was thrown out of Heaven, Satan's all consuming passion is to destroy the work of God. Followers of Jesus, then, become a primary object of Satan's attacks. In fact, the more you become like Jesus, the more you can expect to be attacked by Satan not less! Why should he waste his efforts on someone who doesn't follow Jesus? There's no need for Satan to scheme, plot or connive to get those people to sin, to be defeated or to be miserable. They already belong to his kingdom and are under his influence even if they don't recognize it.

So, understand this simple fact, follower of Jesus. As a child of the one, true King, Satan sees you as a target worth aiming at! The more you make up your mind to live into your calling in Jesus and become the person God wants you to be, the more you desire to be filled with the Holy Spirit, the more you are going to attract opposition. If you expect living for Jesus to be a life of spiritual ease, endless joy, or effortless positivity at all times, you are headed for a major disappointment. You are in a war – that means spiritual blood, sweat and tears will be shed. This is a war in which you are going to have to fight. It's a war in which there are no conscientious objectors. You can't just refuse to participate. You're on one side or the other even if you don't want to take sides. You will have learn how to use certain kinds of weapons that only God can

give you. Otherwise, you will be wiped out! Notice how in these verses, Paul just takes for granted that spiritual warfare is just a normal part of following Jesus. "A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.... Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. Stand your ground...." (Eph 6:10-11, 13-14 NLT) From this passage, God teaches us that, secondly...

## **YOU HAVE A REAL ENEMY**

We don't have time today to make a complete study of the devil, but here's a few important reminders. First, the devil isn't a force or an influence; he's a person, a personal being. The Bible presents him as a supernatural being actually created by God – probably an angel – who then rebelled against God and was kicked out of Heaven along with other creatures that rebelled against God. He is bigger, stronger and greater than you or me. But he is not an evil equal of God, by any stretch of the imagination. He doesn't know everything like God. He's not all powerful like God. He's not able to be everywhere at one time like God.

Nevertheless, the Bible tells us that Satan is immensely powerful. He's called "... the god of this world" (2 Cor 4:4 NLT). Jesus referred to him as "... the prince of this world" (Jo 12:31 NIV). The Christian leader, Peter, described Satan this way, "Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." (1 Pt 5:8 NLT). You would think such an enemy would be easy to recognize, but just the opposite is true. The Bible portrays the devil as a master of deception. Jesus told us Satan is "... a liar and the father of lies." (Jo 8:44 NLT) The Bible also tells us that "...Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." (2 Cor 11:14 NLT) By the way, Satan is perfectly content and prefers to work undercover. One of his favorite tactics is to convince people that he doesn't even exist. You can be very sure that people who have concluded that believing in Satan is no longer possible in this age of education and science are particularly vulnerable to being manipulated and used by him.

Satan doesn't work alone. Paul makes it clear here that he is the leader of a vast kingdom and the general of an evil army of spiritual beings whose purpose is to do his will: "... evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places." (Eph 6:12 NLT) These spiritual forces don't restrict their activities to individuals. They infiltrate the corridors of governments, the halls of education, the boardrooms of corporations and the living rooms of families. Their purpose is to damage, to destroy, to deceive and to turn people away from God. Above all they hate God and they hate God's people. In any and every place on this planet that you find sin, suffering, war, poverty and injustice, you know that Satan and his kingdom are alive and well. Satan and his demonic forces are the greatest enemy of God and His truth and His grace anywhere in the world today.

You should never focus on the devil, but you do need to educate yourself, as a follower of Jesus and a child of the one, true King, on his tactics and strategy. Paul calls them

the devil's schemes or strategies there in v. 11. In another letter, he says, "... so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are familiar with his evil schemes." (2 Cor 2:11 NLT) Well, are you indeed, child of the one, true King, familiar with the devil's tactics and strategies to defeat you spiritually? Here's just three big ones. Obviously, he tempts you to sin. He can't rob you of your salvation or take away the gift of eternal life God has given to you, but he can get you all enslaved to attitudes and behavior that don't honor God. Jack Handey, a comedian, tells the story of a bully who demanded his lunch money every day when he was a kid. Because Handey was smaller than the bully, he simply gave the bully his money. "Then I decided to fight back," Handey says. "I started taking karate lessons, but the instructor wanted \$5 a lesson. That was a lot of money. I found that it was cheaper to pay the bully, so I gave up karate." Unfortunately, many followers of Jesus can have the same attitude about Satan and the temptations that come their way. It's easier to pay the bully than to learn how to fight him.

Did you know that Satan is also an accuser? What does that mean? It means he knows very well your areas of personal weakness. He works very hard at reminding you of how short you fall from what God wants you to be. He will do everything to rob you of the assurance that you are indeed a child of the one, true King and constantly reminds you of your unworthiness before God. He loves to encourage you to compromise or abandon any and every godly priority you ever make. He's not always trying to get you to commit some terrible sin like murder or adultery. If he can get you not reading your Bible, not praying, not learning how to share your faith, not confessing your sins, not forgiving other people who hurt you, and not growing in your understanding of what it means to be a child of the one, true King, he's more than satisfied. If he can get you to focus on the urgent rather than the important, or good things instead of the best things, he's already won the war. But, fortunately, God tells us through Paul here that...

## **YOU HAVE REAL WEAPONS**

The old saying – “the best offense is a good defense” is no truer than for a follower of Jesus engaged in spiritual warfare. It's called the armor of God and Paul describes the different pieces in these verses. It's not always recognized as a piece of God's armor, but I suggest to you that God's power and victory is both our first and single greatest defense. “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” (Eph 6:10 NLT) God has already defeated Satan and his kingdom in the most decisive battle ever fought in this great war. That battle was fought and won at the cross and the empty tomb. When Jesus died and rose again, all the powers of darkness and evil suffered a defeat from which they will never recover. As a result, you and I are called to engage in this daily battle from a place of victory not for victory. Well, then, why are you still supposed to fight it out every day? This illustration has always helped me. You've heard of D-Day back in World War 2. When the Allies successfully took the beaches of Normandy despite terrible losses, in June of 1944, World War 2 was essentially over. But V-Day – the day of total surrender by the Nazis and complete victory by the Allies - occurred a year later in May of 1945. Between June of 1944 and May of 1945, very real battles had to be fought and many soldiers died. The cross and the empty tomb was D-Day in this great spiritual war between God and Satan, but V-Day – when God destroys Satan

and his kingdom forever – is still in the future. In between, there are very real spiritual battles to be fought and an ongoing spiritual war to be won. But, make no mistake, the outcome is not in doubt. We fight from victory not for victory!

So, child and warrior of the one, true King, go out every day with God's truth strapped onto your mind and heart. "Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth...." (Eph 6:14 NLT) That's what you need to be protected against Satan's persistent lies – lies about God, lies about you, lies about others, lies about life and lies about what matters and what's truly important. Then, child and warrior of the one, true King, put on every day God's declaration of your acceptance by Him. "Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness." (Eph 6:14 NLT). It might be called the "breastplate of righteousness" in your Bible. You are accepted by God and in God because of the shed blood of Jesus on the cross. He paid the penalty for your sin fully and finally then and there. When you put your faith in Jesus and what He did for you, God accepted you as His child forever. A Mafia leader named Terry Teague was on trial for murder. He had some of his associates pay off one of the jurors – a Mr. Fogarty – to hold out for a manslaughter charge instead of murder. When the trial was over, the jury began their deliberations. After a long time, they returned a verdict of manslaughter. Terry Teague was overjoyed. He went over to Mr. Fogarty, shook his hand and said, "Was it much of a fight in there?" "It was terrible," Fogarty said. "The other eleven wanted to acquit you, but I held out for manslaughter." The world tells you God ought to condemn you. Satan tells you God ought to condemn you. Your conscience tells you God ought to condemn you. But God wants to set you free. Satan is always trying to remind you that you are unworthy of God's grace and love. Well, of course, you are! We all are! But it's not about our worthiness, but instead the worthiness of Jesus' to take our place. That's God's righteousness.

Next, child and warrior of the one, true King, slip on every day the foundation of the salvation message itself. "For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared." (Eph 6:15 NLT) What you put on your feet is like your foundation or the basis of your life. You and I need to wake up every day standing in the truth of what God has done for us. Are you discouraged today? Anxious? Tempted? Consciously and prayerfully remind yourself, "... If God is for us, who can ever be against us?" (Rom 8:31 NLT) Don't forget, child and warrior of the one, true King, to practice and live by faith every day. "In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil." (Eph 6:16 NLT) A shield is made and meant to get dented, battered and hammered on. Your faith in Jesus is going to get tested by life. Satan is going to fire his arrows at you – disappointment, broken relationships, chronic illness, doubts, failures – that's just some of them. Keep holding on to Jesus and what He has done for you and what He says about you. God can use your faith as a shield to protect you from the arrows and blows intended to destroy you.

It's very important, child and warrior of the one, true King, to strap on a godly mindset or perspective every day, too. "Put on salvation as your helmet...." (Eph 6:17 NLT) The devil's favorite target is the human mind. If Satan can get you thinking incorrect thoughts about God, about yourself, about how to be right with God, about life, he's got

you right where he wants you. The Bible says, “Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ....” (2 Cor 4:4 NLT) What you think about God is the most important thing about you. Is it any wonder the Bible says, “Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” (Rom 12:2 NLT)

If you are going to think rightly about God, you will need, child and warrior of the one, true King, to increase your knowledge of God's Word: “... and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Eph 6:17 NLT) Get into this book often and regularly. Marinate in it. Study it with others in a Bible class or a small group. It will protect and preserve you when you're in the thick of life's battles. And then last, but by no means least, child and warrior of the one, true King, wrap yourself in prayer. “Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.” (Eph 6:18 NLT) Prayer is like all the hooks, the straps and the buckles that holds all that spiritual armor together. It's through our prayers that God's will gets done here on Earth even as it is Heaven. Prayer reminds us of our absolute dependence on God. Persistent prayer makes us sensitive and alert to the devil's attacks. Prevailing prayer releases the power of God into our lives and into our church.

Maybe you grew up in a church where missionaries would occasionally come and tell amazing, exotic stories about the mission field. Years ago, a young missionary couple told a story of what happened to them at a steamy jungle mission station. One day, an enormous snake—much longer than a man—slithered its way right through their front door and into the kitchen of their simple home. Terrified, they ran outside and searched frantically for someone who might know what to do. A machete-wielding neighbor came to the rescue. He calmly marched into their house and decapitated the snake with one clean chop. The neighbor reemerged triumphant and assured the missionaries that the reptile had been defeated. But there was a catch, he warned. It was going to take a while for the snake to realize it was dead.

You see, a snake's neurology and blood flow are such that it can take considerable time for it to stop moving even after decapitation. For the next several hours, the missionaries were forced to wait outside while the snake thrashed about, smashing furniture and flailing against walls and windows, wreaking havoc until its body finally understood that it no longer had a head. Sweating in the heat, they felt frustrated, a little sick, but also grateful that the snake's rampage wouldn't last forever. And at some point in their waiting they had a mutual epiphany. Satan is a lot like that big old snake. He's already been defeated. He just doesn't know it yet. In the meantime, he's going to do a whole lot of damage. But never forget that he's a goner. That's an accurate picture of the universe. We're in this time Satan is thrashing about. The temptation is to despair. We have to remember that it won't last forever. At the cross and the empty tomb, Jesus has already crushed the serpent's head.

This is a very real war. You have a very real enemy. But, you have been given very real weapons. So, you still have to fight. Every day. You still have to be a warrior. That's an important part of what it means to be a child of the one, true King.