

Well, good afternoon, my brothers and sisters. It's a great delight to be with you again to bring the Word of God at our lunchtime meal. It's wonderful to be in a classy church. Most churches have spaghetti suppers. We have, not here at First Press, we have spaghetti soirees. Well, if you could turn with me, please, in your copy of the Word of God or in the bulletin before you. to Ephesians chapter 6, and we're in verse 10, and we'll be in this chapter for a few weeks as we work our way through this section of Scripture. Let's pray together, shall we? Our Father in heaven, We come into your presence this afternoon in the name of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth. He has released us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to our God and our Father. And we pray this day, our Lord, as we come before your word, that you will send your spirit to strengthen your servant, that I might be used to strengthen these, my brothers and sisters, your children. Now we are the sons and daughters of God. It has not yet appeared what we shall be, but we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him. For we shall see him as he is, And everyone who has this hope purifies himself just as he is pure. And so to that end, O Lord our God, give us grace to pursue holiness and peace with all men and war with the devil, without which we shall not see the Lord. And we offer these prayers in Christ's name. Amen. I'm going to read from Ephesians 6, verse 10, down to verse 20. This is the word of God. Please take heed how you hear. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand, therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance making supplication for all the saints and also for me that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak. When we come this

afternoon and

for the next few weeks to look at what has to be one of the great chair passages of a scripture dealing with the subject of spiritual warfare and today I just want to take a step into the passage and look at the first couple of verses. Finally be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Now when it comes to our combat

with the devil, we face at least two dangers. And the first is to make too much of the devil. our brothers and sisters in the charismatic church can fall into that camp. And I say that because I used to be charismatic back in my early days as a Christian, and Dr. Thomas would often joke that once you're charismatic, you're always a charismatic. When I was installed in my previous charge, he said that I was the most charismatic, and I think he meant that in a funny way, of all the Presbyterian pastors he'd ever met. And I'm thankful for my brothers in the charismatic church. They have tremendous joy. And the way they sing will put most Presbyterian churches to shame. Not this church, though. You all sing with tremendous gusto. A few weeks ago, in particular, when you sang at the end of Psalm 3, we sang - I forget the hymn now - we sang It's gone out of my head. But you lifted the roof. It moved me profoundly. And my brother Thomas stopped the organ in the last verse or the penultimate verse. And the singing was one of the most moving things I've ever heard in worship. So you all sing very well. But if our charismatic brothers and sisters have a a fault, they can sometimes focus too much on the unholy spirit, the devil. They see the devil everywhere, behind every cornflake, behind every problem. They are always rebuking demon this and demon that and so forth and so on. And it can be a little bit like the horror movies, which I trust you don't watch, But I'm sure some of you watched them in your earlier days as I did. I remember as a child watching the Omen series and it scared the liver out of me. And pretty much those movies will always show you the power of the devil absent the power of Christ who has conquered the devil. If you think too much of the devil, you'll be terrified. On the other side of the theological fence, though, there are those of us in the Reformed faith, and we tend to make too little of the devil. We tend to ignore him. We tend to forget about him. We're so consumed with the sovereignty of Christ and the power of God that we never give the devil any thought whatsoever, and that is also a mistake. Paul wants you to know in this passage that the devil is a real enemy with real power and real malice and to an extent, real authority. In Genesis 3, we've been there

in the past few weeks, when Adam and Eve fell into sin, in a sense, God allowed the devil to take charge of the world. It was kind of an act of poetic justice. It was almost as if God said to Adam and Eve, if you want to listen to the voice of the serpent, let's see how you do with him. ruling the world. And so in the Old Testament,

God was still sovereign of course, but he allowed the devil massive reign in the Old Testament and he held the vast majority of the world in darkness and the thralldom of hell. Apart from a little piece of real estate, smaller than South Carolina, considerably smaller than South Carolina, Israel and Judah, the devil had sway over the rest of the world and held them in check. And now we believe as Christians, rightly, the devil's been conquered, he's been chained, he's been cast into the pit, and we see the gospel having significant sway in the world, but, Paul says, don't underestimate him. Listen to the way the devil describes him. We do not wrestle. The reason why you've got to be strong in the Lord and in his strength and to put on the armor that only he can give is because we do not wrestle with flesh and blood. Flesh and blood are not your major problem in life. They're a huge problem. but we wrestle against principalities and powers, against spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. They're rulers, they're authorities. The devil still has some authority permitted to him, although it has been significantly and massively curtailed. And so you've got to remember that. I'm watching a show in the evenings, In the mission house, it's called the Long Road Home and it documents our soldiers in the first Iraq war when they were doing what they thought was a peacekeeping mission in Sadr City. And of course, it became a hotbed of insurgency. at the end of that conflict, and many of our soldiers lost their life. And at the beginning of it, this group of brave soldiers go out to do a peacekeeping mission. They're helping fix a blocked sewage drain in the city, and suddenly they get ambushed and they're trapped on this rooftop for several days because the rescuers, they got ambushed as well and couldn't get to them and they were stuck there with not enough supplies. And at night time, they were all cursing themselves because they forgot to bring their night vision goggles. They thought to themselves, well, we're going out by day, we'll be back by day, we don't need night vision goggles and they're heavy besides anyway. And so they find themselves at night being surrounded by hordes of jihadists out for blood and they couldn't see properly and they underestimated the danger they were in and the enemy they would face and they got in trouble. And that essentially is what Paul is saying here at the beginning of Ephesians 6. Without in any way undermining who Christ is, what Christ has done, and the victory he has won over the powers of Satan, don't dare underestimate the clear and present danger from your real and evil enemy,

the devil. Now the wonderful thing when we come to fight the devil, and it's the major point I want to leave with you today, is that we do not fight him in our own strength. That's very, very important. And we don't fight him in our own strength because we have absolutely no strength in ourselves, none. But we have all the strength of God for us, with us, and in us to stand against the devil and hold the line. And actually, God isn't calling you to conquer the devil. He's not calling you to cast him out. He's calling you to hold the line, to stand firm and to stand true in Christ. And to do that, you have all of the resources of God. And don't forget that. It's amazing how often we do, right? I am somewhat dependent upon electronic devices to help me with my notes and so forth when I'm preaching. And I tend to think the New Testament way. The left-hand side of my brain doesn't know what the right-hand side is doing. And I'll often get up, like this morning, and panic and think, oh no, I didn't charge my iPad. And a few weeks ago, that was the case, and I had like 5% in my iPad, which is not going to last five minutes. And Mr. Brad Martin, our executive director, was very helpful. He came in, and he purchased for me a mobile charging bank. And it means wherever I go now, I've got more than enough power to charge my iPhone, my iPad, and my laptop at once, all together. It's tremendous. But I keep forgetting, this morning I woke up, came, and my iPad was flat, and I thought, oh no. And then I realized, hold on a second, I've got this doohickey, which Mr. Martin bought me, but I'd forgotten about it. And we as Christians can forget that we have the power of God, and when we do that, we tend to stand in our own power with predictable results. So Paul says, finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Now what's it mean to be strong in the Lord? And it's important to realize that Paul has been documenting in, and it's a wonderful lesson to do in your Bible study, whenever you look at a topic in a letter or a book, see how does that book address that subject? And Paul has gone to great lengths in the previous chapters in Ephesians to address the strength that's available for you in God. And it's a triune strength. It's not just the strength of God in general, it's the strength of God, your heavenly father. It's the strength of Christ, your heavenly brother. And it's the strength of the Holy Spirit, your present helper. So let's just think about that for a second. First of all, this strength that's available is the strength of the Father, our Heavenly Father. It's the strength He used to raise Christ from the dead. If you have a copy of the Word, turn back to Ephesians 1 and verse 18. Or verse 17 actually, sorry. Paul prays that, he says, I pray that God would pour upon you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the true knowledge of God. That the eyes of your heart would

be enlightened. That you might know what is the hope of his calling. What are the surpassing riches of the glory of his inheritance among the saints. And, What is the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe? What level of power is that? This power, is in accordance with the working of the strength of his might which he brought about in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And he has put all things in subjection under Christ's feet, Paul says, and has given him his head over all things to, or for the benefit of his body, the church, which is his fullness, the fullness of him who fills all things. who fills all in all. That this power is the power that God used raising Christ from the dead. Now think about that. When Christ died, he was in the lowest possible spot on earth. He had just been literally through hell. Not the highlight reel of hell, but in those hours of darkness, he experienced the full wrath, infinite and eternal wrath, compressed but not diluted. And in his divine person, in his human nature, he experienced all of the eternal and infinite fury that God had to give him. And there is the son's body. He's broken, he's dead. He's naked on the cross. At his feet, there's blood and urine and excrement in a pile. He never looked less like God

than he did at that moment. In fact, Isaiah said that he was marred beyond the appearance of the human. See him in glory, you saw someone who looked just like God. See him on the cross, and he barely even looked human. He'd been crushed as I assess. Donald MacLeod makes a wonderful comment when the dying thief looks at Jesus and says, remember me when you come into your kingdom. He said that was the greatest act of faith the world's ever seen. Because Jesus never looked less like a king on that cross than he did then that day. But he saw through all of the appearance and he saw a king in his glory. And he trusted him and was safe. And yet God took Jesus from the pit of hell and raised him to the height of heaven by his resurrection power and put him above every authority and every rule and every power and every dominion and every name that is named in this age and in the ages to come, which of course includes Satan. And that same power that raised Christ from the dead is available not in part but in whole for you when you fight the devil. It's the power of your heavenly Father. And we tap into it through prayer. Paul mentions it in prayer, right? I pray that the eyes of your heart will be enlightened. There's a wonderful Farside cartoon And these men are digging out from under this, they're in a prison, and they're digging out under the wall of the prison, and they're coming up, and they're in this tunnel, and they're coming

up to the surface, and they're poking their spade through the soil. Now, we can see the whole picture. And above them, in the air, there are fish swimming. They can't see that, of course.

And they're poking up, and there's water coming through, and one of the men says to his friends, boys, we're about to taste the first drops of free rain on free soil. And of course, we're about to get much more than they bargained for. Push up with that spade one more time, and the whole lake or sea's gonna come pouring through into their tunnel and flooding it. And Paul says, that's what happens when you put your trust in Jesus, the fullness of Christ who fills all in all, floods into your soul, but it's the power of God the Father who raised Christ from the dead.

Then secondly, it's also the power of God the Holy Spirit.

If you turn forward in Ephesians 3, again Paul's speaking about prayer. For this reason, he says, I bow

my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches, not the poverty, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being. That Paul wants God to strengthen

you by his spirit in your inner being. Why? So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. That you being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all of the saints what is the length and breadth and height and depth of the love of Christ. So that you might be filled up again to all of the fullness of God. That's an incredible thing. that when you trust in Jesus, you don't just get a little bit of God in your soul, you get all of the fullness of God himself. in your soul to strengthen you and expand your soul. And the Spirit's role is to strengthen your heart through faith that you might reach up. Because it's through faith that we pull Christ down into our souls and believe into him. And in a sense, believe him into

us. And the Spirit's role is to create faith and to nourish faith and to sustain faith in this spiritual conflict. So it's the Father's strength

and it's the Spirit's strength. And it's also the Son's strength. In Philippians 4, which is the

American footballer's favorite verse. Paul says, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Now that, tangentially, probably has some relevance to throwing a pigskin down the pitch. But it's real meaning is to strengthen

you to be content in your current circumstances. Paul says, I have learned, doesn't come naturally, I had to learn this. I have learned in whatever state I am It doesn't come externally. It's not found when the Lexus is going really well and everything's going well in the business. It's not found naturally. I learned it. It's not found externally. In whatever state I am, rich and poor, whether I'm in Lydia's marble bathroom in Philippi or out sleeping on the road under a tree in the rain with water

dripping from a leaf onto my nose when I'm sleeping, I have learned, Paul says, in whatever state I am therein to be content. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. It's the titanic strength to be content whatever your circumstances are. That's much more impressive than throwing a pigskin 100 yards down a pitch onto the hand of a running back. But that strength is available for you from the Father, from the Spirit, and from the Son. In 2 Timothy 4, 17, Paul says, at my first defense, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. The church abandoned him. May it not be charged against them, he says, but the Lord stood with me and strengthened me. Isn't that a wonderful verse? Much better to have no one on earth standing with you and the Lord Jesus coming alongside you and putting his arm on your shoulder and saying, it's okay, brother, I'm with you. I'll not abandon you. I'll not forsake you. I'll not forget you. It's the son's strength. And we have this strength through our union with Christ. We are united to him. We're connected to him. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1 verse 30, but by God's doing, you are in Christ Jesus who became to us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. That when you come into union with Christ, which is the logic of the gospel, how can God give your sins, I often ask seminary students, how can God punish Jesus for your sins and that be okay? And the fact that he's God and can do anything he wants is a bad answer. Because there are some things God cannot do, God cannot be unjust. So how can God punish you or punish Christ for your sins and that be okay? And it's amazing how many seminary students can't answer the question. And the answer is, union with Christ. You're united to him. The same logic, man, when you take out an American Express card, in union with your wife. and all of her debts suddenly become legally yours. Ladies, you can go out today and spend \$5,000 in Dillard's, and while your husband had no part in spending that money, he has full part in paying the bill. Because that's how covenants work. And Jesus has set up exactly the same arrangement with the Father and you. It's like what Paul said about Epaphras. Remember, if this man owes you anything, lay that at my account. And Jesus stands at the right hand of the throne of Almighty God. And when the devil accuses you to God and reminds God of all the debt you owe him, Jesus says, it's okay. If this sister, if this brother owes you anything at all, Lay that at my account and I'll pay it. But it's not just your sins that go to Christ and not just even his righteousness that goes to you. Everything that is Christ's becomes yours. His place at the father's right hand becomes yours too. I arise to my father and

to your father, he said. His place in the Father's heart. Father, he says at the end of John 17, I want that the same love with which you love me might be in them. This is amazing. Christ always is praying, not my will, but thy will be done. But here, he rises up, if I can say it, with a holy arrogance, if you understand the expression, and says, Father, here's something I want. I want you to love them just as much as you love me. I want the same love with which you love me to be in them and with them. I don't want them ever to feel like a second-class adopted son in the family, not really part of the family. I want you to love them with all of your heart, as much as you love me. The same love which you love them, love me, I want it to be in them. So you get the Father's heart, you get the Father's home and glory, you get the glory of God himself in Christ, that there'll come a day when you will radiate the glory of Jesus, and you'll look just like him. The glory you have given to me, Father, I have given to them. Now, it'll belong to him and flow from him as the origin, but it'll shine through you with not one drop less glory. If you could see the least saint today, as you will see them in glory, you'd be strongly tempted to fall on your face and worship them, because they'd look more like God than anything you'd ever seen before or since. When you walk through the realms of glory, the angels will have to hide their face because the glory of God in Christ will radiate from every atom of your redeemed humanity. But along with all of that, you get all of his mind, his wisdom. He has made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification. So don't ever let the devil tell you you can't stand before him. It's like when David stands before Goliath, and David says, you're a shepherd boy, are you going to stand before me? And David essentially says, if I stood before you in my own name, I'd be in trouble. But I stand against you in the name of the Lord God of hosts, and this day he will deliver you into my hand, and I will chop off your head. So it's the strength of God that we have, my brothers and sisters. It's the strength of God, the strength of God in Christ. And yet, Paul says in Ephesians 6, finally be strong, literally in the Greek, be continually strong, and in the strength of his might. It's a passive, present verb. While it's the strength of God for you, You have responsibility to avail yourself of it. It's a command. You must be strong. And there's an awful lot we could say and an awful lot I'd plan to say about that, but let me just leave that with you. Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. It's our union with the Godhead through Christ that is the origin for this strength. When I was in Savannah, I was too cheap to buy a steel electric gas blower. So I bought, I've now got one, but back then, I had just a small enough lot in my house that I could almost cover the whole lot with a wired blower, an electric blower. And the wire was almost long

enough to get to the far corner of the front yard. And it didn't stop me trying. So I'd plug it in, and I'd kind of pull it out, and I'd be kind of pulling the blower, and it'd be going very well, and it'd be getting almost to the edge of the lawn, then suddenly, I would pop the plug and immediately what happens? Immediately, the blower begins to die. Because the blower is absolutely dependent upon the wire connecting it to the mains. And when you fight against the devil, my brothers and sisters, it's essential that you remember that you are absolutely dependent upon God and his strength. And so you've got to Lean in and engage in the spiritual disciplines that foster that union and that communicate grace through that union to your soul. The word, prayer, sacraments, the fellowship of God's people. That's how we strengthen ourselves. When we remind ourselves of who God is and what God has promised to us through his word and prayer and sacraments. There's a wonderful story you remember in David's life when David was off at Ziklag. And he returns, he's kind of hiding from Saul, running with the Philistines, and he's raiding Philistine towns on the QT, special forces missions. And he comes back to Ziklag, you remember that night, crests the hill, and they see smoke rising. And as they come on top of the hill, they look down, and the camp's been destroyed, and everyone's been carried off. All the wives are gone, all the children are gone, and the men speak of stoning David. And Dr. Davis at seminary was

talking about that, I'll never forget it, and he said, in that moment, everything had changed. David's family had been taken off, their possessions had been taken off, their wives, children, all gone. Everything had changed. And his men's loyalty had evaporated. They spoke of stoning him. Everything had changed. But at the same time, he said, nothing had changed. And David reached through all of that by faith. And it says he strengthened himself in the Lord. And that, that's the picture I want to leave with you today when you face the devil. When the devil comes in and tells you that up is down and down is up and evil is good and good is evil and the world's upside down, inside out and back to front. Don't stand in your own thinking Don't parley with the devil and think, okay, this sounds fun and interesting. This is the devil who persuaded Adam and Eve to exchange paradise for an apple. You don't wanna play checkers with the devil when he's playing chess for your soul. In that moment, you've got in your mind to sober yourself up by remembering who God is, who God is in himself, and who God is for you in Christ Jesus, and what God has stored up for you. All of his strength is there. I'm gonna talk tomorrow night to the men about one of the foundational virtues of manliness, and it's the ability to do what you know is right when you want what's

wrong. Right? And there's times when you will want what's wrong and there's times I want what's wrong. Any man tells you they ever proceed in their sanctification beyond that, they're lying to you. It's like Jimmy Carter when, or Reagan when he said about Jimmy Carter, any man who tells you that he enjoys a cold shower in the morning before breakfast, that's not the only thing he's lying to you about. There's times all of us want to do what's wrong. We want to think what's wrong. We want to say what's wrong. We want to do what's wrong. We're sinners. We never graduate beyond that in this life. And when you want what's wrong, the battle's half won and you want it. Because the heart gets what the heart wants. In those moments, you've got to reach up by prayer and say, Lord, help me. Lord, save me. Lord, rescue me. Against all of the devil's assaults and all of the devil's lies. I was thinking this morning, I will end here, this is the last thing I'll say, and I really mean it this time. But I was thinking this morning about poor Samson. You remember Samson, the great hero of the Old Testament, the great anti-hero. And again and again and again, he broke his Nazarite vows. Don't touch the dead, don't drink wine, and don't cut your hair. It's amazing how far God let him go before the strength of the Lord left him and Samson went out to rise himself against the Philistines and he had no strength left. And maybe that's where you are this morning. You know, you're there in the dungeon, your eyes have been gouged out, and you're just pushing around this, you're kind of doing the work of donkeys, pushing around the gray, and you think, oh, what am I doing here, Elijah? And the devil's mocking you. And the Philistines would have come, they were there, and they saw Samson, and they had this mindset, because their gods were like this, God deals with you quid pro quo. You only get in what you get out. And Samson, you've messed it up and you're done for. I can hear them in my mind's eye singing a wee song that you might put to the tune Amazing Grace. Amazing Dagon, how sweet and kind. His praise we must now speak. Samson once could see, but now he's blind. He was strong, but now he's weak. Through many jawbones, fires, and gates, he's beaten us black and blue. It took Dagon a while to step up to the plate, but now he's brought us through. And as for Yahweh, Samson's God, we guess it must be true, if his man has no hair because the girls cut it off, there's nothing he can do. And one of my favorite verses in the Old Testament. Now the hair on Samson's head began to grow again. And Samson called to the Lord and said, O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes. It was a terrible prayer, it was very selfish. For my two eyes, forget about

your glory, they gouged out my eyes, right? And of course, it had nothing to do with Samson's prayer, though that was the means God used. It was the fact that Yahweh had said he would be a Nazarite to the day of his death. What Samson had done didn't matter. It was what God had said. His words can never be unspoken. His word can never be undone. Not even our faithlessness can undo the faithfulness of God. And there'll come a time, my brothers and sisters, when you have no strength. That's today, actually. But there'll come a time when you know you have no strength, and you have no merit of your own, and you've sinned yourself. out of court altogether, beyond the pale, and all you can think about is how unfaithful you have been. And I'm telling you now, in the name of the Lord God Almighty, though you are faithless, God remains faithful. He cannot deny himself. And God says, when your back's to the wall and you have nowhere else to turn, You can always look up and you can call upon me and what I was for Samson, I will be for you. I will give you strength and you will stand in the evil day. That's all I'm asking you to do and I'm not asking you to do it by yourself. God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are with you now and they'll be with you forever. until the day breaks and the shadows of Satan's brief little strutting authority are banished forever. Amen. Let's pray together. Oh Lord, our God and our Father, you are the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the God of Samson. And I pray for myself, oh Lord. I pray for my dear brothers and sisters gathered here this afternoon. Oh Lord, help us. We're so prideful, so full of our own strength, and therefore so often empty of yours, but give us grace each day to go in prayer, to plug ourselves in self-consciously into Christ and the Spirit and the Father, through the means of grace, and feed and nourish us, oh Lord, that you would be glorified as we stand strong against the devil and his wiles. For Jesus' sake we pray, amen.