

“Until He Returns”

(Ephesians 6:10-20)

January 2, 2011

Order of Worship for January 2, 2011, Communion

Pre-service Song

Welcome and Announcements

Call to Worship: Psalm 120

Songs of Worship:

“The Battle Belongs to the Lord”

Song # 732

“Prince of Peace”

Overhead

“Rise Up, O Church of God”

Song # 433

“Power of the Cross”

Overhead

Offering and Offertory

Celebration of the Lord’s Supper

“Behold the Lamb” (sing twice; servers come forward during)

Song # 304

Invitation and Prayers of Confession and Consecration

Dedication and Distribution of the Elements

“You are My All in All”

Song # 583

Message:

“Until He Returns” (Ephesians 6:10-20)

by Pastor Bronson

Closing Song:

“Jesus Saves”

Overhead

Parting Word of Grace

The evening study in Hebrews is cancelled.
Enjoy the time with your family and friends!

“The Prayer Closet”

December 26, 2010

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **Sheryl Jackson at William Carey Academy**, Chittagong, Bangladesh: that Miss. Jackson will her crutches as well as her students; that the Lord will protect her and the school from all violence and disease; that the Spirit will begin to quietly draw the hearts of many students and families to the Lord
2. President Obama: that the Spirit will refresh and open his heart and mind to new truths; that the Lord will protect him and his family; that by grasping the truth he will be freed from false thoughts and deceptions
3. All the Church Boards: that the Spirit will guide them as they take in new members and reorganize their responsibilities; that new voices will bring new ideas and renewed zeal; that each board will commit to much prayer
4. **Military Personnel of the Week: MSgt. David Howell** (son-in-law of Eileen Hewitt):
5. **College Student of the Week: Aaron Bowen at Butte College** (son of Randy and Ruth Bowen):

Today we return at last to Ephesians. We are beginning at Ephesians 6:10-20. The title of the message is “Until He Returns”. The reason for that title is simply to indicate that what is going to be mentioned now describes what you and I will be engaged in until Jesus comes back. That is the reason for that title.

This is the first Sunday in 2011, and this is the second day of the new year. I wonder, how many of us made New Year’s Resolutions? Don’t indicate! I heard someone who made this comment, though I will not reveal who said it: “We are going to clean out the garage this year.” And though some people close to me may think I said this, they would be wrong: “I am going to clean up my desk!” When you make those resolutions, I am aware enough of human nature to know that someplace in the back of your mind there is the “maybe”, or “unless something else comes up”. So I am not going to engage in that. That is just silly. I have no intention of cleaning up my desk. And I warn people not to put their grubby hands on pile of stuff because I know where everything is, or at least I can find it in time.

I do have, however, sort of a challenge to put in front of all of us. What do you anticipate for your life in the year to come? Now I realize that that is a hugely open ended question; it is as varied in its possible answers as our lives are varied in their interests, responsibilities and potentialities. But I recommend the question for this reason: I think it is far better to think forward than it is to think backward. We are going to be much more content with ourselves if we ask this question, “I think I might...” rather than “I wish I had...” We should be thoughtful about that.

Whether you follow my recommendation or not, the Bible have some needful words of counsel as we anticipate the year to come. If you haven’t yet, please open your Bibles to Ephesians 6:10-20; I am going to read those verses and then we will have the beginning of a series of messages. There is a huge amount of reflection that comes to us regarding the way we live our lives in what Paul writes.

“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.”

So Paul has written to the Ephesians, soliciting on his behalf their constancy in faith and prayer.

We have come now to the almost end of the letter. You can see it just over the horizon. Verses 10-20 are a general application covering all that Paul has said in the entirety of the letter. That is the significance of his beginning with that word, “finally”. He is saying in a certain sense, “OK, let me sum this up, I want to bring here before the whole of you who are reading my letter the big application of everything I have had to say. This comes at the end of other applications. He has made a series of them. Chapters 1-3 of Ephesians are doctrine: what has God done for us, what was the nature of our need, what is the nature of grace, what is it that God has set out that we would take it and live by it: that is chapters 1-3, for the most part. When you come to chapters 4, 5 and 6, Paul begins to develop specific areas of application, at which we have looked. He begins by saying, “How are we supposed to live together as Christians within the body of Christ? That is 4:1-5:9, living together as Christians. The second area of application that he dealt with is (5:10-21) how to walk in the world at large. It is one thing to walk in the company of believers, it is another thing to walk out in the world where they are not believers and we recognize that we have

an opportunity and a responsibility to witness for Christ. Then Paul goes on and he says more specifically (5:21-33) how do we walk together as husband and wife? We know that world watches us, and one of the places the world watches us is in the quality of lives together: do we represent, do we embody something distinct that reveals the character of Christ and the purposes of God in our married lives? This is part of the huge tragedy of the present day when Christian marriage often, almost as often as non-Christian marriages. We should not only be stumbling and saying God, “Why?”, but we should be crying out to the Lord, “Mercy, don’t let this happen to us!” But he goes beyond that and he says (6:1-4) how are we to walk together as parents and children? I contend that probably one of the reasons we have so many divorces today is because of the failure of parenthood in the generation before. But he also address the issue of (6:5-9) how to walk as employees and employers, as masters and servants, the whole variety of way you can pick up and apply those verses in 6:5-9.

Those are the areas of application, the specific areas. Now Paul comes to the closing and Paul says, finally, on top of all those specifics I want to make a general statement about the way things are. What he has to say is especially relevant to our day. He wants us to know that all who hear and accept the call of God to live by faith in Jesus, the minute you do that, the minute you sign up to part of the company of the redeemed, you are signing up to be part of the special forces. Those forces are engaged in the war with the devil. Listen again: “. . . *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. . .*” Oh! I thought I was supposed to be saved so I could have a happy marriage. I thought I was going to be saved so I could have a peaceful and pleasant time. I thought I was going to be saved so that my troubles would be done. It sounds a whole lot to me like Paul is saying, watch out, your troubles have only begun!

This is not Paul’s first mention of the spiritual realm in this letter to the Ephesians. But by bringing up this element again at the close of the letter in the form of a general exhortation it is perhaps pressed home to us that our part in the spiritual war is the framework for all of the other activities and relationships which define our lives.

I see Dorothy Huston over there. Dorothy, did the young lady who came to church last week come to church today? Haven’t seen her? The young lady came to church last week. She’d not been to church for a while. After she had been to church last week she contacted Dorothy Huston again. She made this comment: “That was probably best hour and a half I have spent anywhere in my life. I will be there next week.” Why do we think she is not here? You can come up with a hundred reasons, but let me ask you to add this one: somebody doesn’t want her here. Don’t ever forget it.

Turn with me please to Ephesians 2:1-3. Here Paul gave a statement about spiritual powers and principalities. He gives a snapshot in those three verses of the condition of fallen humanity without the intervention of God’s grace. How many of us know somebody who is not saved? That person is living without grace. That person therefore is described in these verses. You will like it if you think about it that way. This is what he says, “*You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*” Understand that that second verse refers to Paul as a Pharisee, highly, highly discipline and religious to the core, and dead in his sins. The prince of he power of the air that is mention is another title, of course, for Satan or the devil. Before we are captured by God’s grace we are all dead to God and we are the willing slaves of the devil. We are held captive by the sinful passions and desires of our own bodies and minds.

Please go on to Ephesians 3:8-10. Paul here writes and he says, “*To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the*

manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” What is brought home to us by looking at those verses is that the story of our salvation, our struggle with sin and death, takes place in a larger context. That context is the spiritual warfare and it is essential for us to remember that that spiritual warfare is primarily between God and Satan. It is Satan’s war of rebellion against God. It is also essential for us to remember that he has already lost. He lost when he failed to deflect Jesus from His purpose. Jesus had determined that He would love sinners. Any of us know sinners? Are you determined to love them? Through our Lord Jesus Christ, love is demonstrated to be the power that defeats the evil one. It is sacrificial love.

This is presumably incomprehensible to Satan. Even after the fact of the resurrection Satan continues, as Peter says, to wander around as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Surely he cannot think he will win. Jesus has already ascended to heaven. I made reference last week to Satan’s dealings with Job. Remember Satan’s dealings with Job? God is sitting with His angels in heaven. Satan comes wandering in. The Father says, “Hey, where have you been?” Satan says, “Wandering around on the face of the earth.” The Father says, “Did you see my servant Job?” Satan says, “Yeah.” “Do you see how faithful he is to me?” the Father asks. Satan says, “The only reason he is faithful to you is because you protect him from all trouble.” What is God’s response? “OK, remove the protection.” Will Job stand? Yes. Satan comes back later and says, “Hah! Listen, a man will do anything as long as his skin stays.” The Father says, “OK, afflict him.” Does Job stand? Job stands! Job says, “I know that with my eyes I will see my Savior standing on this ground.” That is a foreshadowing of the church. The constant effort by Satan is to oppose and destroy God’s works of grace in the world. God is hated by Satan with a furious hatred, and so he sets out to destroy every evidence of the triumph of His truth in grace. It is essential for you and me to remember, we are works of God’s grace. We - are - works - of - His - grace!

Now you put this into the larger context. Remember Ephesians 3:9-10. My intention, God says, through Jesus through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, through the work of grace in the lives of the saved, is to demonstrate to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies the triumph of grace and truth, not just through the lives of individual believers, but through the church. Do you wonder why the church is under constant attack? All Satan needs to do is to take the hammer of his hatred and smash the body of Christ and cause it to scatter and to break into a hundred factions. Or, as you and I should know, to take the hammer of his hatred, wrap it up so that it strikes with softness and scatters us into indifference to one another, so we wander off, leaving the body behind. At that moment there is no longer a viable testimony of God’s grace.

“But I’m a good person!” You are not designed to be a good person. You were designed by God’s grace to be a member of the body. That is why we receive the gifts of the Spirit; that is why we only grow up into the character of our Lord Jesus Christ by being knit together and giving ourselves as servants to the needs of others. That is why! And if we do not give ourselves to the needs of others we are not like Christ who gave Himself altogether to the needs of us. Do you see what he says, [it is] through the church. I read this in an article in “Christianity Today” published on December 17th: “Satan and his demons are after the larger prize of crippling the gospel witness of each church. Capturing a congregation with internal conflict is effective and lasting.” Don Remley the attack against the church in Egypt: horrible. There the attack against the church in Nigeria: horrible. Some of us are aware of the immense persecution against Christians in the Darfur region of southern Sudan: horrible. Did you ever notice why there is so little comment by the American press? Why is it our government doesn’t step forward quickly and take action to protect these persecuted Christians? Well, perhaps [it is because] they don’t want to. Perhaps because it fits into the larger plan of suppressing the reality of religious belief and they are so afraid of religious belief that they would rather have passivity fall over the entirety of the nation. Perhaps that is why they are doing all they can to erase the evidence of Christianity from our nation’s past. “Silence the church [and] we’ll have peace at last.” Peace? They’ll have peace, because the evil one will not be speaking into their hearts; until they die.

It is essential for us to remember that in this age the primary issue is the vindication in this fallen world of the grace, truth, righteousness, justice, wisdom and goodness of God. It is the name and the honor of God that is at stake, not my salvation, not my well-being, not my pleasant happiness, not, my personal peace: it is my endurance as one who walks faithfully trusting in God’s grace to the end. Jesus said they are saved who endure to the end. Those are the ones who are saved, not the ones who drop out along the way. It is my faithfulness in being the suffering servant Jesus Christ; whatever He asks me to do, that is what I should do; if I don’t like it, that is just too bad. Because the intention is to vindicate the honor of God. This is not how we think. You might ask yourself the question which at one time had a very elaborate structure of honoring others doesn’t anymore. Listen! Listen to the Spirit of God. Do not expect you already know what He is going to say. Listen and obey.

Please pray with me: our gracious heavenly Father, perhaps I could say, Lord, too long we have taken our ease, too long we have allowed a hundred other priorities to displace that which is primary. Grant us discernment to understand the difference that which will become dust and that which will abide to eternity and let us live obediently to the glory and honor of Your great Name. For it is in the remembrance of Jesus that we pray. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. What are your New Year resolutions and what developments do you anticipate for your life in the year to come?
2. What is your understanding of spiritual warfare? Do you see it as something relatively rare and out of the ordinary or as a part of our daily walk?
3. In what ways does the story of Job foreshadow the life of the Christian?
4. Who are the real contestants in the spiritual war and what is at stake in the outcome? (See Ephesians 3:9-10)
5. How do Ecclesiastes 3:16-17, 9:3 and Genesis 6:5 and 8:21 help us to understand both spiritual warfare and God’s grace?
6. What is the central or core teaching of 2Thessalonians 2:3-10?
7. According to Jeremiah 31:33, 2Corinthians 3:3 and Hebrews 10:14-16, what is the work of grace regarding the law of God in the hearts of believers?
8. What do you think is the “mystery of lawlessness”? Do you agree with the message today that the huge increase in laws and the powers of government is a parallel development with the increase in lawlessness in the general population, the “lawful increase of lawlessness”?