

Prepped for Battle

Ephesians 6:10-12; 1 Peter 5:8-9

9/6/15

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We come this morning to look together at these central doctrines of gospel renewal. I want to repeat this again, that these doctrines that we've been looking at over the last number of weeks are part of the core aspects of the gospel. They are the primary means by which the Lord continually works renewal. You've heard it said here before, and I want to repeat it again—the gospel is not something that we believe in somewhere in the past. It is something that we enter into the kingdom of God by way of the gospel. The gospel is something we live out day after day, 24/7. We never outgrow the gospel. So, therefore, the central doctrines of the gospel are important for the Christian. They're important for the person who doesn't know Christ in getting to know, what is the gospel about? And so we've looked together at the doctrines of justification, sanctification, adoption, the work of the Holy Spirit. And now we're going to be looking together at spiritual authority. What authority does the Christian have in the name of Christ, strengthened by the Spirit? What authority, specifically, does the Christian have in regard to spiritual battle?

And so before I say anything else, I want to say, I recognize that there are at least—at least—three broad groups before me this morning. First, there are those who are Christians who very much believe in the person and entity called Satan. You recognize his power. You recognize his existence, and his desire, and—let me say it as plainly as possible—his desire to destroy anything and everything that the Lord calls good. That is one group here this morning. There's another group who profess and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, but either they fall off on one side or the other in regard to the person of Satan. They either believe him to be more powerful than he really is and ascribe to him powers that are only the Lord's—that is, God's all-knowing power, his all-powerfulness, and his all-everywhere presence. There are Christians who believe and who have incorrectly ascribed to Satan those same kinds of powers, and incorrectly so. He has none of those powers. But he's still powerful. There are also Christians who don't fall off on the side of ascribing him too great powers. There are many Christians who ascribe to him too little. But then there is the third group, and the third group is represented by those who do not know Christ.

And I want to say to you, if you do not know Jesus Christ this morning, I greatly respect your position. I also want to say, I don't envy your position, because I sat where you once sat, and heard things like what you're going to hear this morning. And that which I'm going to say regarding the spiritual battle between God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit and Satan himself and the reality of evil is going to sound to you like spiritual gobbly-gook. You're going to laugh inside, and you're going to go, "Oh, these Christians again." And that's okay. I recognize that. And so I would simply ask you to give us a little time. Because what I'm going to say does require the work of the Holy Spirit, and requires us to believe by faith, first, that Jesus Christ is real. And know this—that the demons believe in Jesus. They know he is real. Satan knows that Jesus is real. And I want to tell you that Jesus knows that Satan and his demons are real. And so it takes just as much faith to believe both of those realities.

But know this, if you are not a Christian—the moment that I became a Christian was surrounded by intense spiritual battle. What was being thrown at my mind was every possible argument that Jesus is not real, that everything the Bible teaches is untrue, and that God will not uphold what his promises claim. Everything that I'd ever wanted was being given to me in that very moment—the moment I remember hearing the preacher telling me about the gospel. I had three friends get up from my space in a room of two thousand high-schoolers, and they looked at me, and they said, "You're not getting serious about Jesus, are you?" And I looked at them, barely knowing what I was saying, and said, "Well, maybe I am."

They got up, and they walked away, and I never saw them again. In that moment, there was one young lady who I had my eye on, who I'd never met before. I thought she was pretty, and she kept looking at me. And I say this to you just as surely as I say this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ—she looked at me and never took her eyes off of me. Nobody's ever done that except my wife. I had no idea who this girl was, and I never met her, but in that moment, a war waged on my soul, and I made a deal with the Lord. "Lord, if you let me meet this girl, I'll believe in you." That meeting never happened, but I prayed to receive Christ thirty minutes later.

Let me say to you—if you're not a Christian, what I just said to you probably sounds really weird. But there is a battle going on. And I want to say this to every Christian—Satan is not just out there, ladies and gentlemen. He's here in this room. His demons and his evil does not want you to know Jesus, whether you're a Christian or not. He wages war and hates everything that God loves. And he loves you. And he wants you to shut me out. He wants you not to listen to the Word. So, with that introduction, let's hear from God's Word with this question: Christian, are you prepared for battle? Ephesians 6:10-12, 1 Peter 5:8-9.

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. [Ephesians 6:10-12]

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. [1 Peter 5:8-9]

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. May the Lord bless the preaching of his Word, and may he strengthen the teacher.

Famous gang movie, *The Untouchables*, tells the story of Jimmy Malone and Eliot Ness, who sought to try to take down the famous mob boss, Al Capone. And in a rather famous scene, Jimmy Malone looks at Eliot Ness and has a conversation with him and challenges him. And he says the following. Jimmy Malone looks at him, and he says:

Malone: You said you wanted to get Capone. Do you really want to get him? You see what I'm saying is, what are you prepared to do?

Ness: Anything within the law.

Malone: And then what are you prepared to do? If you open the can on these worms you must be prepared to go all the way. Because they're not gonna give up the fight, until one of you is dead.

Ness: I want to get Capone! I don't know how to do it.

Malone: You wanna know how to get Capone? They pull a knife, you pull a gun. He sends one of yours to the hospital, you send one of his to the morgue. That's the Chicago way! And that's how you get Capone. Now do you want to do that? Are you ready to do that? I'm offering you a deal. Do you want this deal?

Ness: I have sworn to capture this man with all legal powers at my disposal and I will do so.

Malone: Well, the Lord hates a coward. Do you know what a blood-bond is, Mr. Ness?

Ness: Yes.

Malone: Good, because you just took one.

What Malone was trying to convince Ness of is this: Capone played for keeps. And he wanted to ask him the question, what are you prepared to do? Are you prepared for battle?

Paul is preparing you for battle. Are you prepared? You see, as Thomas Brooks, a famous seventeenth century theologian and pastor said, he said these words, “Know that it is not the knowing nor the talking nor the reading man but the doing man that at least will be found the happiest man.” Jesus said, “If you know these things, blessed and happy are you if you do them. Not everyone that says, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father that is in heaven.” I must tell you, this is a call to action. Yes, it is a call to think. It is a call to know God’s Word. But it is a call to do, aided by God’s grace, strengthened by his power that is at work within you by his Holy Spirit. It is a call to action. And so I ask you before I get started, again, are you prepared for battle? Let’s look at this in two ways. First, it clearly outlines the resources that are there to prepare the Christian for battle. But there is also knowing the enemy that is also very important. First, resources, secondly, knowing the enemy.

First, resources. The passage tells us very clearly in Ephesians, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” The resources that he first outlines first is your position in the Lord. This is everything in regard to Paul. To understand what first is your resource, you must understand in whom you stand, in whom you are united. That is Paul’s key argument throughout the Book of Ephesians to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ—first, your position. One of my mentors and professors in seminary, Brian Chapel, put it this way:

If you could take the Book of Ephesians and break it down, it would be in two ways. Once you were, now we are. Consider what Paul says. Once you were dead, now you are alive. Once you were under the dominion of Satan, now you are seated in the heavenly realms. Once you were an object of wrath, now you are his glorious inheritance. Once you were separate, now you have been brought near. Once you were foreigners, but now you are fellow citizens. Once you were aliens, but now you are household members. Once you denied the gospel mystery, now you are understanding the gospel mystery. Once you were in infants, now you are maturing in Christ. Once you lived in your old self, now you have put on a new self. Once you lived in darkness, now you live in the light.

Your position in Jesus Christ is your first, is your middle, and is the end of all of your resources—that by faith in the work of Jesus Christ for your soul, to make for himself a kingdom the body of Christ, you are in Christ. That is your greatest resource, because from that position flows everything else. Your first resource is your position in Jesus Christ.

Secondly, flowing from it are the sources, then, are the things that flow from that position. What flows from this position? He tells us. “Finally, be strong.” Okay, so he calls us to strength in the Lord and in his mighty power. In essence he’s saying, because you are in the Lord positionally, then, therefore, he is your source of strength. Now, it needs to be clear that this is not meant to be, somehow, that God comes along and dispenses for you spiritual vitamins—that somehow comes along with your strength already and kind of boosts you a little bit. He’s not just divine adrenaline for you and for me. No. What is meant here is, you and I have no native strength in and of ourselves to be able to wage war in this battle against sin, against the flesh, against the devil. We have no power in and of ourselves. We have power only because we are positionally in Christ.

Therefore, it is not his strength added to us. It is his strength one hundred percent in us that enables us. Again, Chapel says it this way: “The phrase that Paul uses here to refer to God’s might he has used previously in this epistle. In the first chapter, Paul writes that he wants the saints to know God’s incomparably great power for those of us who believe.” That incomparable power the apostle then describes as the power of his might that God exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and is seated at his right hand in the heavenly realms. He’s therefore saying this power that made us alive in

Christ, this power that raised Christ from the dead—this power is the Holy Spirit, which we've been talking about for the last two or three weeks.

And it is this power, this mighty power, incomparable power, that you have because you are positionally in Christ. It is now in you. Therefore, we draw on that power and ought to pray for that power to wage battle against sin that still remains, that is still present though it is no longer our master in Christ. Though it still remains, the power is at work in you to do what? Well, Hebrews tells us what—rather, Romans does, in Romans chapter twelve when it says, “Abhor what is evil, hold fast to what is good.” The only way to do that is to have the Spirit at work in us desiring what is good and hating that which is evil. Left to ourselves, we cannot do that. Only by his mighty power.

So, the resources for the Christian—which is leading to the key theme of battle—is that, for the Christian, you are united to him. You are in Christ positionally, and from that flows his incomparably great power that is at work in you. Therefore, he says, “be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” This is precisely what the Lord said to Joshua. “Be strong and courageous.” I'll say it again, “Be strong and very courageous.” Why? Because he said to him at the beginning and he said it to him at the end of chapter one of Joshua: “For I am with you.” Christian, be strong, because the Lord is not just with you—he is in you, by his incomparably great power.

So, what are we to understand regarding this power? What wisdom, what strength does it give us? Paul tells us here in verse eleven. He says, “Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.” And now, note this: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood,” meaning human beings, “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.” Meaning, Satan himself and all of his minions and all of his demons and his desire to wreak havoc in the world—the world is full of evil. The scenes this last week of Syrian refugees, and of this young boy drowned up on the beach is an image, if you saw it, that will never leave you. Why? Because of the evil that is at war, that has broken out. And all kinds of sin and evil have run amuck in places like Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. In all places of the world, there is so much pain and there is so much evil.

Our battle, however, is not against flesh and blood, but against the one who is behind it. Therefore, by this he tells us to put on the armor of God, which—we're not going to get into those details this morning, but he's saying, what is the purpose for having this armor? It's so that we can take our stand against the schemes of the devil himself, the wiles, his methods. And I believe that one of the things that we must be able to do as Christians—and even if you are not a Christian, I want to tell you that Satan has particular methods. And I'm very grateful, again, for Thomas Brooks. He wrote a book in the middle of the seventeenth century called *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*. It's an excellent book. I've not completed it, but I can tell you, we could be here all day talking about the various devices, the various methods, that Satan uses. But I want to outline just four. As the Holy Spirit by the power of God comes in to enable us to take our stand against the schemes of the devil.

First—the first and greatest, I think, method that Satan uses towards temptation, towards all kinds of evil, is this: deception. He is first and will always be a deceiver. And his tool of choice in his deception is Scripture. You know why I believe in the reality of Satan? Because Jesus did. Jesus, while in the desert, was tempted. And when he was, Satan look at Jesus and he quoted back to Jesus the very words of Scripture when he said, “For you are the Son of God.” You see what he did? All he had to do was to take Scripture that called forth the Son of God and laid it in front of Jesus. He says, “You are the Son of God. Now, do this,” in the hopes that he could deceive Jesus in finding strength separate from the Father, in finding glory separate from the Father.

Let me say this. Every Christian cult has always used enough truth to be believable. Satan loves to take Scripture and twist it back on itself, to take a text to convince you that this sin isn't so bad. He takes Scripture and says, did God really say? And he leads us to believe that somehow he has our best interests.

Because, you see, here's what's interesting about Satan. We learn this from the Book of Second Corinthians. And what Second Corinthians tells us in regard to what Satan does is this—he says that, indeed, in Second Corinthians 12, “He appears as an angel of light.” How does he appear as an angel of light? It's by quoting Scripture, and then using it to convince you that it means something that it doesn't. So, be careful when people quote Scripture—including me. Test and approve what God's Word says. Test and prove what teachers say. Test and prove what books teach. Because the remedy for this deception is to know the Word of God—to have it buried in your heart, to have these seeds planted there—to know it. Satan uses deception, and one of his tools is Scripture. Are you prepared for battle?

His second method—and all of this is from Thomas Brooks—presenting the bait but hiding the hook. Adversity has slain her thousand, but prosperity her ten thousand. So oftentimes he presents and tempts us with sin that seems to have within it so much prosperity, so much that is desirable. But, like a really good fisherman, he takes that hook and puts it deep within the bait, and we don't see it until after we've taken hold of it. Bono, the lead singer of U2, once wrote this great lyric: “Sweet the sin, but bitter the taste in my mouth.” Satan uses a golden cup with the greatest fragrance of wine, but when we drink it, it is nothing but poison. Satan's method is to present the bait but hide the hook. Is that not what we're seeing on the internet day after day after day? Presenting the hook of relationship in the bait of, surely this would be good for you—live a little. But the hook is a data breach, and now perhaps hundreds, thousands of marriages are being ruined. The bait looks so sweet.

The way, the remedy, is, again, to do—by the Spirit of the living God—to abhor what is evil and hold fast to what is good. The Lord's Word, his ways, are always safe. There is no shadow. There is no darkness. There is only love and safety. Because, isn't it interesting—everything that is given to our eyes, things we can put into our mouth, things that we can hold with our hand—no matter how beautiful, no matter how desirable they may be, they will never satisfy. They will always want us to pursue them more. It's chasing after a ghost, which is why we need more. God's grace, his truth, his goodness, always fills our cup to overflowing. We will never find its bottom. Are you prepared for battle?

His third method is minding your sin more than your Savior. Satan wants you to be so focused on your sin, to the point where it's very easy to forget or to doubt the work of your Savior. Thomas Brooks says, “Their eyes are so fixed upon their disease they cannot see the remedy, though it be near. They do so muse upon their debts that they have neither mind nor heart to think of their surety. A Christian should wear Christ on his chest as a flower of delight, for he is a whole paradise of delight. He who minds not Christ more than his sin can never be thankful and fruitful as he should be.” The reality is, one of the things that Satan does is, even though the Christian may recognize that their sin is real—they know it, they feel it—one of the devices that Satan uses is to have you so focused on how heinous that is, how horrible it is, and to make you feel the shame and the guilt of it so much that it begins, he hopes, to choke out the light of God's abundant grace—and that somehow, if we focus enough on how heinous it is, somehow that will make us more deliverable to Christ. This is a deception. It is a method of Satan.

The reality is that when we feel the reality of guilt because of sin, we experience or taste its heinousness, the hook as grabbed hold of us and we feel it pierce us in the cheek and we taste the poison on our lips, and we know it—the best place to go is not dwelling on it, but rather, going to the only one who is a remedy for it, Jesus Christ. As I said to this young couple, Hannah and Zach, who were married yesterday, I said to them, “I want you to hear this and hear this loudly—it is the Lord who has you, not the other way around, and he will not let you go.” And when we, by the Holy Spirit who brings conviction of sin—the difference between the Holy Spirit and Satan is Satan keeps you focused on sin. The Holy Spirit takes you and takes you clearly to the work of Christ. And I will tell you, Christian—today, if you are awash in guilt and shame and you cannot see the light of the grace of Christ for you, then the one who is deceiving you is not Jesus. The one who is deceiving you is Satan himself, who tempts you so much to look on it that you cannot see the majestic work of your Savior. Christian, mind the work of your Savior more than the reality of your own sinfulness.

The fourth method and the final is this—is the temptation Satan presents towards false inferences, false conclusions, based on the trials or the triumphs we are experiencing in our lives. Again, one of Satan's temptations is to have us draw false conclusions from either trial or triumph. Consider this. Do you see that oftentimes our circumstances seem to come at cross-purposes with the things that we're praying for? Or with our desires? Or with our tears, our hopes, or our endeavors? Are the circumstances you're in right now—are they the opposite of the thing that you've been praying for, or that you desire, or that you hoped for? Be careful not to draw false conclusion from that reality, that intersection.

Because one of the conclusions that so many seem to draw is that, when our circumstances seem to be at cross-purposes with the things that we're praying for, we begin to think that the Lord is against us—that somehow he hates us, that somehow God is out to get us. But here's where the beauty of Scripture comes in. We can go right back to Scripture, and we can ask the question: were Abraham's circumstances oftentimes at cross-purposes with the things he was praying for? Yes. What about Noah? Yes. What about Moses? Yes. What about David? Yes. The prophets? Yes. What about Paul? Yes. What about Peter? Yes. And isn't it Peter who says, "Be self-controlled and alert, for your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." And one of the ways that Satan works is he wants to devour your faith. He wants you to be so razor-focused on your circumstances and how they're at cross-purposes with the thing you're praying for, to be able to say to you, "You see? God didn't hear you. God doesn't love you." And slowly but surely, he will try to eat your faith.

Not only with trials—also with triumphs, that sometimes we can make false conclusions when we experience triumphs. We can mistake the gift for the Giver. There are plenty of places throughout Scripture—go read Psalm 73. As the psalmist looks out on all the wealth and all the vigor of those enemies of God, enemies of his, and sees how well they're doing, he's like, "Wait a second. Have I kept my heart pure in vain? Why am I, a child of God, experiencing such things?" And he looks at triumphs, and he says, in essence, "God must be for them and against me." The inference drawn from triumphs is, because I'm doing well, hey, maybe me and God are fine. I don't know that, just like I don't know just because we're experiencing trials means that somehow God is against us. Not so.

Our circumstances routinely run at cross-purposes with the things that we hope for, pray for, or expect. And when we look into Scripture, we see over and over and over again that, indeed, if we look at Abraham, David, Moses, Job—consider Job. What about Jeremiah? What about Jonah? What about Paul? And what about Peter? In Luke 22, Jesus is preparing Peter, and he says to him, "Simon, Simon. Satan has asked to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." Peter was about to go into something that was exactly at cross-purposes with the things he would say. Because in a few passages later, he would say, "No, Lord, may this not happen." He says, "Peter, guess what? You're going to deny me three times." And that's exactly what happened. But notice what Jesus says: "Satan will try to sift you." He will try to pound you out. But what does the Lord say? The Lord says, "I have prayed for you." And not if you turn back, but when you turn back, strengthen your brothers. And isn't this what Peter does when he says, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brother throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

I know I need to go, but I say this to you—again, are you prepared for battle? Let me say my answer before you: no, I am not. And when we're honest, neither are many of you. Because left to ourselves, we are not prepared. You know who else wasn't prepared for battle? Abraham, Moses, Noah, Job, Joshua, or David. And neither was Peter. But do you know what? None of them were prepared, but the Lord did prepare them. They became prepared for battle. You see, the one who is prepared is the Lord, for this is his battle. And Satan is arrayed against him. But do you know, Satan's destiny has already been pronounced. The head of the serpent is crushed, because your Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, died on a cross and went to death, though he did not deserve it, and was raised on the third day, and he came as a

victor from the grave to be our Shepherd, our Prophet, Priest, and King, who is going ahead of us in the battle—who is arrayed with all the strength, and who calls you to himself. And if you profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then you are in him—the one who is prepared for battle and who now stands ready, who has given you his Spirit to equip you for this battle.

Christian, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Know the enemy, for he hates you, because he hates God and hates everything that God loves. His face is set against you. You must know his methods. May the Spirit make you wise. May he bury you deep in the Word. And may we be doers of his Word by his grace and the empowerment of his Spirit, for the battle is on. It is here. He plays for keeps, but our God is the one who is victorious, and we can claim that today. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, I thank you for your Word. Who can capture all of its beauty and greatness? By your Holy Spirit, Lord, may anything that I have said that does not bring glory to your name—may it fall to the side. May it be forgotten. But, Lord, anything that I have said which delights you, which is governed by your Spirit and your Word, may you use it strategically to strengthen your people—to make us wise, to prepare us for battle, to take our stand against the very one who hates you and hates everything that you love. But, Lord, if we are in you, we are equipped by your mighty power. May you give us victory over him whose destiny is sure. The head of the serpent is crushed, for our Savior is on the throne. Equip your people. In Jesus' name. Amen.