

Pataskala Church of the Nazarene
April 22, 2007

The Battle facing the Church

Text: Ephesians 6:10-20

Introduction:

Some of you might have heard this story before, but it was Bill Bright who was traveling by plane.

He noticed that the man sitting two seats over was thumbing through some little cards and moving his lips.

The man looked to be in his fifties and somewhat professorial with his goatee and graying brown hair.

Guessing that he was a fellow-believer, Bill Bright leaned over to engage him in conversation. "Looks to me like you're memorizing something," he said.

"No, actually I was praying," replied the other man.

"I believe in prayer too," Bright responded.

"Well, I have a specific assignment," said the man with the goatee.

"What's that?" "I'm praying for the downfall of Christian pastors."

Surprised, Bill Bright said, "I would certainly fit into that category. Is my name on the list?"

"Not on my list," the man replied.

Stories like this can make us uneasy, but they also remind us that we are firmly entrenched in the midst of a spiritual conflict.

While the outcome has already been determined by Christ's victory over sin and death, Paul says in 1 Cor. 15:56-57,

“56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” We need to Praise God for the Victory we have in Jesus! Amen!!

The battle rages on friends.

Paul wanted to let the believers know, ***“1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, (the devil), the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.”*** Ephesians 2:1-2

Hear this - The enemy, the Devil, seeks to rob God of glory by leading men and women on a pathway of rebellion, **so it's important** that we understand we are not talking just about unbelievers, Paul is warning believers to be aware of how the Devil wants to cause them to become disobedient.

You see it becomes important for Christians to take time every now and then to review our understanding of this ongoing spiritual warfare lest we believers become casualties in this great battle.

Background:

Though the church at Ephesus was undergoing only minimum persecution from without at the time this letter was written, they were experiencing some conflict from within.

Some influential, yet ignorant men were teaching **false doctrine, propagating fables and genealogies** and putting forth ideas such as the **forbidding of marriage** and **abstaining from certain foods**.

Paul understood that they constituted a very real danger to the believers in that city and so he warned Timothy to guard what had been entrusted to his care. ***“... Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge.”*** I Tim. 6:20

Yet Paul never considered that the battle was to be fought against flesh and blood (i.e. other people).

The real conflict was of a spiritual nature and so it had to be approached with this perspective in mind.

Listen to what Paul says about the nature of spiritual warfare.

I. Our adversary in warfare is the Devil. Ephesians 6:10-13 The Message

“10 And that about wraps it up. God is strong, and he wants you strong. 11 So take everything the Master has set out for you, well-made weapons of the best materials. And put them to use so you will be able to stand up to everything the Devil throws your way. This is no afternoon athletic contest that we'll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. 12 This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels.

Do you realize this morning how very real this battle is? Paul says it's a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels.

13 Be prepared. You're up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it's all over but the shouting you'll still be on your feet.

Make no mistake, our enemy is the Devil. He is constantly scheming to ruin mankind.”

A. Here are some of Satan's strategies to keep unbelievers away from God.

1. He blinds the minds of unbelievers

Paul continues to be our teacher when he says, ***“If our Message is obscure to anyone, it's not because we're holding back in any way. No, it's because these other people are looking or going the wrong way and they refuse to give it serious attention.***

All they have eyes for is the fashionable god of darkness. They think he can give them what they want, and that they won't have to bother believing a Truth they can't see. They're stoneblind to the dayspring brightness of the Message that shines with Christ, who gives us the best picture of God we'll ever get.” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4)

Church, I believe we have incorrectly said that unbelievers do not face Spiritual Warfare.

Paul says it plainly that those who refuse to give serious attention to the Message of Christ do so because they have their eyes on the fashionable god of darkness – the world.

You see – Satan is referred to as the ***“Prince of this world.”***

And his goal and strategy is to blind unbelievers and keep them away from the truth of God.

Eugene Peterson says, ***“They’re stone-blind to the dayspring brightness of the Message that shines with Christ.”***

2. He snatches away the Word of God

Jesus told this parable, when He said, ***“Study this story of the farmer planting seed. When anyone hears news of the kingdom and doesn't take it in, it just remains on the surface, and so the Evil One comes along and plucks it right out of that person's heart. This is the seed the farmer scatters on the road.”*** Matthew 13:18-19

You and I have watched it over the years when people have come to Christ.

And somehow – sometime in this experience they walk in disobedience in God’s Word and they remain shallow. There’s no spiritual depth.

And the Devil comes along and takes that shallow experience working, consistently working and pulls them right back into his kingdom.

That's why I continue to plead with every believer here today to get involved in a Small Group which studies the Word of God.

Studying the Word of God will establish and entrench you in your relationship with Him so that when the enemy comes, you'll know how to stand.

3. Thirdly, He sets traps for the unwary so that they oppose the Lord servants (See 2 Timothy 2:24-26).

For those of us in the ministry, we have painfully experienced the battle when it comes to those believers in the Family of God.

It's been a mystery to me how believers get upset about trivial matters within the Body of Christ and lose focus on the main deal.

Paul even says to the young preacher, Timothy,

“24 A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, (a servant of the Lord must be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people 25 Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people's hearts, and they will learn the truth. 26 Then they will come to their senses and escape from the devil's trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants.”

Every believer in the Body of Christ needs to be aware of the strategy by the enemy to upset and stop in its tracks the Mission of Christ for His church.

Can Satan use believers for his strategy to attack God's purpose for the church? According to Paul the answer is resounding **Yes!**

It says perhaps these people **“will come to their senses and escape from the devil's trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants.”**

Now let me stay here for a moment.

You see - The more we follow that which is good, the faster and the further we will flee from that which is evil.

That's why it's so vitally important that every believer in this body understand the Battle we experience from Satan and his demons.

As we guard diligently the communion of saints and the unity of the believers, this will guard us from unfruitful works of darkness.

I want you to notice how often the apostle Paul cautions us against disputes in religion; (In other words, stop arguing about doctrine, and just stay in the Word of God.) which surely shows that religion consists more in believing and practicing what God requires, than in subtle disputes that divide the church of God.

You see – now understand this – Paul says there are some in the church who **for some reason you can't teach them.**

Paul says there are some in the Body of Christ **who are apt to strive.** I'm not sure why but they don't seem to be happy unless they've got someone else unhappy.

And sometimes they can get pretty mean about it.

Sinners are taken in a snare, and in the worst snare, because it is the devil's snare; they are slaves to the devil.

And the only way they can be delivered, and the only way they can escape is through repentance, which is a gift from God.

And we must ask it of Him by earnest, persevering prayer

Satan sets traps for the unwary so that they oppose the Lord servants

4. Fourth - He masquerades as an angel of light to deceive men and women.

2 Corinthians 11:13-14

“13 These people are false apostles. They are deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 But I am not surprised! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”

B. Secondly - Satan's schemes for believers.

1. He fills our hearts to lie (sin Acts 5:1-6).

Many of you would know the story of Ananias and Sapphira

They allowed Satan to get into their hearts.

They lied to the Holy Spirit.

They stole money that was not theirs.

And they paid for it, by losing their lives.

2. Secondly - He hinders the servant of God from doing His work 1 Thessalonians 2:18

18 We wanted very much to come to you, and I, Paul, tried again and again, but Satan prevented us.

3. Next - He destroys the unity of the church by creating discord Ephesians 4:26-27

26 And “don't sin by letting anger control you.” Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 for anger gives a foothold to the devil.

4. He leads the world to persecute the church Revelation 2:10.

Jesus said to John on the Isle of Patmos - ***10 Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life.***

Peter reminds us that the Devil is on the prowl like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. 1 Peter 5:8

He is to be respected for his strength and, in fact, can only be overcome by complete reliance upon the power of God. Jude 9

Believer friend, we can't face him on our own.

His greatest weapon is deceit.

Illustration:

Do you remember the Twilight Zone?

An American is on a walking trip through Central Europe happens on a residence for a brotherhood of monks during a raging storm.

Much to his surprise, they only reluctantly take him in.

Later that night, the American discovers a cell with a man locked inside.

An ancient wooden staff bolts the door.

The prisoner claims he's being held captive by the "insane" head monk, Brother Jerome.

He pleads for the man to release him.

The kindly face and gentle voice of the prisoner wins him over.

The American confronts Brother Jerome, who declares that the prisoner is actually none other than Satan, "***the father of lies.***"

He is held captive the "Staff of Truth," the one barrier he cannot pass.

This incredible claim convinces the man that Jerome is indeed mad.

As soon as he gets the chance, he releases the prisoner---who instantly transforms into a hideous, horned demon and vanished in a puff of smoke!

The stunned American is horrified at the realization of what he has done.

Brother Jerome responds sympathetically, "I'm sorry for you, my son. All your life you will remember this night and whom you have turned loose on the world."

"I didn't believe you," the American replies. "I saw him and didn't recognize him"--to which Jerome solemnly observes, "That is man's weakness and Satan's strength."

II. Our armor in warfare. Ephesians 6:14-17

For this great spiritual conflict, God provides for us the spiritual armor we need to constantly wear.

I've borrowed from my neighbor the riot gear for a Columbus Police officer.

I want to ask Matt Black if he would come up and assist me with this illustration as I preach.

A. First - The belt of truth (buckled around your waist).

(Put the belt on)

"Truth" here refers to the Gospel of Jesus, and it also speaks of the quality of truthfulness in how we relate to each other as those who have new life in Christ.

B. The breastplate of righteousness.

(Put the chest protector on)

By putting on God's righteousness, believers are committed to being imitators of Him and so doing the right thing in all our dealings.

C. Your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace.

(Put the let guards on)

With this equipment the believer is ready to bear the Good News of the Gospel.

It is only through the death of Christ that anyone can be at peace with God.

D. Take up the shield of faith.

(Take the shield)

Faith is the impregnable shield that extinguishes all of the flaming arrows of the Evil One.

He is same one who stands before the throne constantly accusing us yet never persuading God of our guilt.

E. Take the helmet (which is) salvation.

(Put the helmet on)

In Isaiah 59:17 God the ultimate, victorious warrior wears **'the helmet of salvation'** as He saves His people and judges their enemies.

F. The sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

(Take the Sword)

This is an important offensive weapon meant to be used in close combat with the enemy because that's how close the devil gets in this battle with us.

Thank you Matt for helping me with this demonstration. Let's give him a hand.

Sunrise was dawning when Los Angeles motorcycle police officer Bob Vernon saw a red pickup truck speed through a stop sign.

"This guy must be late to work," he thought to himself.

He turned on his emergency lights and radioed that he was in pursuit.

The pickup pulled over, and the officer approached

Meanwhile in the truck, the driver thought, "The cops already know!"

He rested his hand on the same gun he had used a few moments before to rob a twenty-four-hour market.

The sack of stolen money was beside him on the seat.

The officer said, 'Good morning, sir, may I see your--'

He never finished the sentence.

The driver shoved his gun toward the policeman's chest and fired from just inches away.

The cop was knocked flat seven feet away.

A few seconds later, to the shock of the criminal, the officer stood up, pulled his service revolver, and fired twice.

The first bullet went through the open window and smashed the windshield.

The second tore through the door and ripped into the driver's left leg. "Don't shoot!" the thief screamed, throwing the gun and sack of money out the pickup window.

What saved the policeman's life was dozens of layers of Kevlar, the super strong fabric used for bulletproof vests.

Only three-eighths of an inch thick, Kevlar can stop bullets cold.

The Bible instructs every Christian to put on the full armor of God.

Simple qualities like righteousness and faith can deflect what the Enemy of souls may fire at us.

III. Our activity in warfare Ephesians 6:18-20

Here Paul spells out where the battle lines are actually drawn.

The enemy will do anything to keep the Gospel message from going forth!

Because this is so, we are told to ***pray at all times in the Spirit.***

I will go more in depth in this part next Sunday.
But let me just give you some general thoughts.

A. This prayer is to be unceasing (at all times).

Even with the awareness of our adversary and the armor of God, Christians are only capable of standing firm when we are continually in prayer.

We cannot think that if we just put on the armor we'll be protected.

No! Prayer, unceasing prayer has to be involved.

And it's not just prayer -

B. This prayer is to be done in the Spirit.

In other words, it is not our piety or merits that will result in answered prayer, but the Spirit of God interceding for us.

C. This prayer is to be for all the saints.

Since all believers are involved in spiritual conflict we all need the support of one another's prayers.

What should we pray for? Pauls teaches us:

(1) That we will not be unaware of the Devil's schemes and tricks;

(2) That we will put on the armor of God so that we can stand firm;

(3) That we will be bold in our witness to others.

Conclusion:

The attack of Pearl Harbor took place December 7, 1941 on a sunny Sunday morning.

A minimal contingent of soldiers was on duty at the time

Most offices on the base were closed and many servicemen were on leave for the weekend.

New technology, including the new radar mounted on Opana Point, were in place, manned and functioning at the time of the attack.

The incoming Japanese attack planes were detected by the radar and reported, but were mistaken for an incoming group of American planes due from the mainland that morning.

While on practice maneuvers outside the harbor that morning, an American destroyer spotted a Japanese submarine attempting to sneak into the harbor.

The submarine was fired upon, immediately reported — and ignored.

Despite these and many other warnings, Pearl Harbor faced great loss that day.

It will always remain in infamy to our nation.

The losses and ill preparedness came from one major cause...no one believed it could really happen.

We are in spiritual warfare.

Sometimes we call it a bad day or blame it on mean people, but many times we are under heavy assault from the devil.

Do you believe this?

Have you wondered why you're going through what you're facing?

Remember the sermon last week on Trials and Hardships that come our way.

Have you wondered about the connection with what I've preached this morning?

Friend, let me tell you that this is connected with the enemy of your life and he's doing everything he can to destroy you in this battle.

We are facing a Battle in the Church.

Are you on the front line, properly fitted with the armor?

Are you unceasingly praying?

Are you encouraging others in this battle?