

Ephesians 6:10 - 23

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² 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. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled round your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

²¹ Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. ²² I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you.

²³ Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Intro Archbishop Justin Welby has described 2017 as a year of uncertainty. As we have been reminded this morning by the news of yet another terrorist attack, this time again in Istanbul killing at least 39 people, there is so much disastrously wrong in our world: whether it is suicide bombers killing scores of innocent people or the horrendous inhumane violence in Syria, Iraq and the Yemen. Sometimes we feel that we too are under personal attack battling internally against a sudden assault of negative or aggressive thoughts

Are these things simply human aggression and folly or are there powerful demonic forces behind these situations ?

C S Lewis once wrote: *“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.”*

Certainly our two readings today make it clear that not only the apostle Paul but Jesus himself believed in the reality of the powers of evil:

As Jesus prays for his disciples, he prays for our protection from the “evil one”. Elsewhere he refers to this “evil one” as *Satan – the accuser*,

as the *father of lies*, as the *prince of this world*,

and as *Beelzebub – the Lord of the flies i.e. of death and corruption*

If Jesus, the Son of God speaks so clearly about the existence of Satan, who are we to deny it ?

No surprise then that Paul talks about the reality of this spiritual battle: *Ephesians 6: ¹² 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.*

During the North Africa campaign, a visitor to General Montgomery was somewhat surprised to see he had large portrait of Rommel in his office.

Monty's response: “the first principle of warfare is to know your enemy”.

So what can we learn from Jesus and Paul about Satan ?

He is powerful, he is scheming which implies both intelligence and cunning (*the father of lies*). he is out to destroy human beings,- why ? because we are not only precious to God our heavenly Father, but we bear his image.

How do we fight Satan and his powers ?

1. Together. This passage in Ephesians is addressed to them collectively. The picture is of a Roman phalanx with arms and shields locked together against the enemy. It is when we allow ourselves to become isolated from our fellow Christians that we become vulnerable and liable to be picked off by

the enemy. This is why so much of Jesus's final prayer for his church is all about us continuing to be united. This is also why Satan loves to sow disunity between Christians, to try and prise us apart from each other. Whenever we see that happening, we need to recognise into whose hands we are playing.

2. Do not attempt to fight Satan in your own strength.

be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Satan is a powerful enemy, described as being like a prowling lion seeking someone to devour, or a savage wolf desperate to shred a lamb to pieces, or even in *Revelation* as a dragon. We would be fools to try and fight any of those beasts in our own strength. *In Narnia, the children and all the creatures are terrified of the white witch, until they here the wonderful news that the great lion Aslan is on the move. When Aslan is at your side, there is nothing that can make you afraid.*

In the gospel we see Jesus' complete mastery over Satan and all his minions. Jesus talks about *driving out demons by the finger of God...* As we would say: *Jesus has more power in his little finger...than Satan will ever have in his entire kingdom.*

3 With the armour of God *Billy Connolly's grandmother: There is no such things as bad weather – only inappropriate clothing. There is such a thing as bad spiritual weather when we are buffeted all around by Satan's storms, but we have been given highly appropriate clothing in the armour of God. Please note: all these items are essential – there are no optional extras!*

1st. the belt of truth The belt is what holds everything else together. strapped on. **Honesty and integrity** c.f. Satan the father of lies.

the truth of God's word. Constantly bombarded with the untruths in advertising: *money is the way to personal fulfilment, or sex or selfish ambition* – in what those around us say about others and about life.

2nd. the breastplate of righteousness – being right with God –

Above all trusting in the righteousness of Christ, not our own.

i.e. hearts that are open and cleansed by the forgiveness of God.

But also walking in the light, lives that are holy and pleasing to him.

3rd. the shield of faith *which protects us against the fiery darts of the evil one* - those negative and soul-destroying thoughts that seem to fly in out of the blue: *I'm useless, I'm such a failure, God doesn't care about me, no-one cares about me, it's going to be a total disaster, what's the point, there is no hope...or maybe a temptation it won't do any harm, no-one will know, or I hate that person, I wish they were dead...*

Faith is seeing things as they really are,

seeing things as God sees them.

The first thing we need to see is to recognise where these thoughts are coming from – not God, not reason, but the evil one.

We also need to see that God is with us and loves us and is infinitely more powerful than the evil one. *Elishah at Dothan*

4th. the helmet of salvation. The helmet protects us against the death-blows of the enemy. When Satan says: *you have had it, God won't save you now.* As God's children we have never *had it.* Jesus has rescued me and defeated all the powers of death on the cross. I am assured of eternal life and no-one can take that away from me. Having that hope which is utterly certain – for it is based not on who I am, but on what Jesus has done for me – enables me to hold my head up high without fear.

All these items of armour are defensive to protect us against spiritual assaults. But we also have equipment so that we can attack and defeat the enemy.

5th. Gospel boots – the best army boots give you a firm grip on the ground, enabling you both to stand firm and to run to where you are called.

The *gospel of peace* is the only thing that will give us such a firm footing. We stand not in our own strength, or by our own wisdom or experience or holiness but only on the grace of God.

Equally it is when we have the *gospel of peace* firmly strapped on that we are motivated to go to the rescue of others who so desperately need the gospel.

6th. the sword of the Spirit, *which is the word of God* – both to parry the blows of the enemy – remember how Jesus countered the temptations of Satan in the wilderness? Each time with the word of God *It is written (each quote from Deuteronomy 6-8).*

Also to guide our prayer as we pray according to God's word.

But a sword that has become rusty is no good at all; it needs to be kept honed and polished. We can only do that by spending time daily in God's word – even memorising scripture verses that speak to our hearts.

7th. Prayer – *pray at all times in the Spirit All times, with all kinds of prayers and requests; for all the saints.*

This is how we keep in touch with our commanding officer, how we see the bigger picture, how we get guidance, directions, encouragement, how we call up **air cover** resources far far greater than anything we could muster by ourselves.

If we are to not only to survive but to grow as individuals and as a church in 2017, if we are to see God's kingdom grow in our community and in our land, we need to recognise that the real battle is a spiritual one. However that should be a cause for **hope** not fear, because it is a battle which Jesus has already won on the cross and for which He has given us all the weapons and all the resources to win on the ground.

John 17:11 – 19

¹¹ *I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.* ¹² *While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.*

¹³ *'I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.* ¹⁴ *I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.* ¹⁵ *My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.* ¹⁶ *They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.* ¹⁷ *Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.* ¹⁸ *As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.* ¹⁹ *For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified*

