

This morning we come to our final text in our series through Ephesians. I entitled this series “**Becoming What We Believe**,” because of my conviction that what we think will shape our lives.

Paul packs a lot into this little letter. He talks about how God has revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He talks about the Church, addressing themes such as conflict, individualism, and racism; Ephesians calls us to belonging, mutuality, and love. He talks about worship, prayer, renewing our mind, and transforming our character. He even talks about marriage, family, and work.

We come to the end of Paul’s letter and after all that he’s said, we might expect him to conclude with, “*Now that you know what you need to know, you can sit back, relax, and put up your feet—the hard work is finished, the holiday has begun.*” Instead, we hear a call to action. Yes, God is good, loving, and strong. God is close; He is interested in your life. “But,” Paul tells the church, “God is not the only spiritual being who is interested in your life. There is another who seeks to destroy you and the world that God has made.”

There is a very real battle going on around us, one that we can’t always see with the eye, or hear with the ear. Paul doesn’t want us to be caught unaware—flip flops and a bathing suit work well at the beach, but they offer no protection on the field of battle.

I want to begin by telling you a Jesus story this morning, taken from Mark 1:21-27. And rather than simply hear the story, I want you to imagine being a part of it; if it helps, let me encourage you to close your eyes as I describe the scene.

A man makes his way to synagogue, he takes the same path he

has taken his whole life—he grew up in this town; he grew up going to synagogue. His eyes take in all the others streaming toward the little building—“*we are like ants, walking single file, our feet know where to take us; we could find our way with our eyes closed.*”

Upon arrival, he takes a seat beside familiar faces, and he waits for the leader to begin the service. He scans the crowd and notices a face he’s never seen before—“*it must be a visiting Rabbi. I hope he’s not as boring as the last one. I hope he doesn’t spit as much as the one before.*” He settles in and waits—he is neither expectant nor bored—he is a Jew and good Jews go to synagogue.

Soon enough the Rabbi was introduced—Jesus of Nazareth—he wasn’t much to look at, that is to say, he was rather plain—not especially tall or good looking. But as the Rabbi began to speak, the man began to squirm. At first, it was just the regular fidgeting of a man who was stuck in a seat when he’d rather be walking around. But the fidgeting became more anxious, then it became fear, and finally full-blown terror.

You see, the man in question was plagued by an evil spirit. He wasn’t aware of this fact, no one was; remember, he was a good Jew, and he was at synagogue. His body began to rebel, but he didn’t see what the evil spirit saw, more accurately, the man didn’t hear what the evil spirit heard. The man heard Jesus of Nazareth, visiting Rabbi; the evil spirit heard the voice of God.

In eternity past, this spirit was created by God—a ministering angel—created to serve, to worship, to have fellowship with the Lord Almighty. But that was long ago, before the Great Rebellion, before Lucifer and other angels battled God for supremacy. Lucifer and

these angels were cast down from Heaven, unable to rob God of what they wanted to possess—His glory. And now they roam the earth, seeking to destroy what God loves: people made in His image.

As Jesus spoke, this spirit heard a voice from its past. The spirit screamed, “*What do you want with us Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!*”

Can you hear the terror of this spirit? Imagine the horror on the faces of those attending synagogue that day—they knew this man, they knew his voice, but he was screaming in a voice not his own, speaking words not his own.

Now look at Jesus—can you see Him? See Him the way the evil spirit sees Him, not with reverence and awe, but with terror. This is no ordinary Rabbi, dealing in words—this is the Holy One of God, the One with unlimited power and authority. In His presence, evil spirits tremble, they beg for mercy that will not be given.

“*What do you want with us Jesus...Have you come to destroy us?*” “*Be quiet!*,” Jesus roared, “*Come out of him!*,” and with one final shriek, the evil spirit was banished.

You can open your eyes. The evil spirit heard and knew what the man did not know—Jesus is higher, Jesus is greater, Jesus stands above the powers of this dark world, Jesus stands against the spiritual forces of evil that have infiltrated God’s world.

Ephesians 1 tells us that Jesus was raised from the dead and seated at God’s right hand, far above all rule and authority, power and

dominion. And Paul tells us that this incomparably great power is for you—for those who believe in Jesus.

The question is, *why would we need such power? What is this power for?* In the story I just told, the evil spirit knew something that many of us don’t know, or fail to remember—as Christians, we find ourselves in a battle.

The Bible describes God’s enemy by many names: Lucifer, Satan, the Devil. Jesus told His disciples that the enemy is out to steal, kill, and destroy your life with God. 1 Peter 5:8-9 says, “*Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith*”.

The apostle Paul tells us that we are in a very real battle, one that we can’t always see with the eye, or hear with the ear. *Why do we need the power of Jesus? **So that we can stand firm in the battle.***

At this time I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bible to Ephesians 6:10-20; you can find our text on page _____ in the blue Bible.

***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 around 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.

As Paul concludes his letter to the Ephesians, he offers one final exhortation that contains three imperatives. These “imperatives” dominate the text—they are commands, marching orders for a people living in a battle zone; the rest of the text flows from these three commands.

Command 1: Be strong in the Lord's mighty power

Command 2: Put on the full armour of God

Command 3: Stand Firm.

I want to deal briefly with the first and third command, and then more time discussing the second. Let's begin with the first:

1. *Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power:* In this first command, Paul promises both more than what we need and less than what we want; let me explain. The chief sin of humanity is the sin of pride, the sin of independence—*I don't need God, I want to be god, I want to exist independently of Him.*

Paul doesn't say in this text that God will make us superhuman or

heroic—God is not a performance enhancing drug. That's what we want, isn't it? To be given something that will make us strong and independent? We don't want to be weak or to rely upon another. But God doesn't ask us to “man up,” “to be brave,” or to “find the strength within;” none of these are sufficient for the task.

Jesus promises more, and better, than what we want. He says to us, *Come to Me, I am not overwhelmed by you or your circumstances. Rely upon Me and find rest in My strength. Commune with Me—nothing and no one can snatch you from my hand.* Jesus is the Stronger One. No rival poses a threat to Him. His strength is for you.

Let's turn our attention to the 3rd command...

2. *Stand Firm:* Though Paul employs battle language, the goal is not to win, conquer, and destroy—Jesus has already won; He has already conquered sin, death, and the devil—we are called to stand firm. Four times Paul tells the Ephesians that they are to “stand”. In verse 12 Paul tells us two important things: (1) We are in battle; and (2) The enemy isn't who we think.

Do you ever find yourself praying that Jesus would make your life easier? That He would smooth everything out so that life would feel more like a vacation at an all-inclusive resort? Wake up! We are never more vulnerable than when we fail to remember that a battle is going on around us—the stakes are so high.

Paul says that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against rulers, authorities, the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. We may wake up every day and find ourselves in a battle with our parents, our kids,

our spouse; with our schools friends, our teachers, our students; we battle with rush hour traffic, our bosses, employees, and the work itself.

On the surface it appears that people are problem: people who think differently than me, people want different things than me, greedy people, selfish people, angry people, abusive people—this appears to be the battle. Throughout Ephesians Paul has been addressing the behaviour that causes division among us—we are, no doubt, a part of the problem, but there is more going on than meets the eye.

There are hostile spiritual forces at work in this world. Paul says that there is a battle taking place in ‘the heavenly realms,’ that is, in a realm that we often do not see or perceive. We are “amphibious creatures” says C.S. Lewis, we occupy two realms—the material and the spiritual. And so we must stand firm in Christ’s mighty power, and, stand with one another against our common enemy.

Many of you are familiar with the military term, “friendly fire;” it refers to soldiers who, in the heat of battle, are wounded or killed by their own people. There is too much “friendly fire” that takes place in churches—we treat one another as the enemy, we take one another out, and our real enemy grins—we are doing his work for him.

In the time remaining, let’s look at the second command:

3. Put on the full armour of God: I want to begin by reminding you that this isn’t the first time that Paul has employed this language of “putting on”. In Ephesians 4, Paul talks about our new life in Christ in terms of changing our clothes. The idea being that since we have been saved, we need a brand new wardrobe to match our brand new

identity.

We **take off** old attitudes, character qualities, and behaviours that no fit who we are becoming. In the same way, we **put on** the attitudes, character qualities, and behaviours of Jesus. Here in Ephesians 6, Paul employs another wardrobe metaphor, but he shifts the focus—because we are in a battle, we require God’s protective armour. Paul goes on to describe seven pieces of armour and weaponry that we need for this battle; to do so, Paul draws from the Old Testament, and from the familiar image of a Roman soldier.

When I was growing up, I was taught to think of these pieces of armour as supernatural articles of clothing that we “pray on” every day. *Lord, this morning I ask that you would buckle the belt of truth around my waist, and fit my chest with your breastplate of righteousness...and so on.*

I don’t think there is anything wrong with this kind of praying, but I’ve come to believe that Paul means something different and more by this text. These pieces of armour represent attitudes, behaviours, and character qualities that exist in God, are “given” to us, and grow in us over time. Let’s take a closer look.

- *Stand firm then, with **the belt of truth** buckled around your waist.* What do we use a belt for? Think utility, not fashion accessory. A belt holds things together—it keeps our shirt tucked in, it holds up our pants. One author says that in the ancient world, the belt “is often associated with tying up long robes and designates readiness for action. For soldiers, a reference is being made to a leather apron-like

covering tied around the waist to protect the lower abdomen.”¹

So how does **truth** enable us to stand in the battle? The word Paul uses for devil—diabolos—means “*the one who thinks and speaks evil*”. Jesus referred to the devil as “the father of lies” (John 8:44). J.I Packer writes, “[The devil] works most often by deception instead of frontal assault—he seeks to ambush and outflank; this kind of attack usually [works better than] an attack you can see coming a long way in advance.”

Some times the devil distracts us from the truth. Maybe you’ve heard people say, “*I can’t believe I did that; I didn’t realize what I was doing.*” At other times the devil seeks to confuse the truth. He tempts us to do the wrong thing or believe the wrong thing, while making us think we are doing the right thing. Maybe you’ve heard people say something like the following—*this relationship can’t be wrong; we are in love. Or, if it feels this good, it must **be** good.*

The devil is the father of lies—he attempts to muddle what we think about God and ourselves. We are tempted to believe that God doesn’t have our best interests in mind. We are tempted to believe that we would be happier, healthier, or further ahead if we lived independently from God.

Let me ask you, *how well do you know God’s truth?* Do you read the Bible regularly? Do you put what the Bible says into practice? If you don’t know His truth, don’t practice His truth, how can you possibly stand firm?

- Paul goes on to say, “*Stand firm then, with the breastplate of righteousness in place.*” In the ancient world, a soldier wore a breastplate to protect their vital organs; today one might wear a bullet proof vest.

Paul’s description of righteous as a breastplate can be found in Isaiah 59:17. Here God is described, Isaiah writes, “*He put on righteousness as His breastplate*”. Righteousness belongs to God—He is perfect, pure, holy, and good. The question is, how does righteousness enable us to stand against the devil?

The Bible describes the devil as the “accuser”—he constantly brings up the forgiven past, he throws guilt and shame in our face. “*You had your chance, you blew it; you’ve gone too far for Jesus to save you now. Look at what you’ve done...why would Jesus forgive someone like you?*” Have you heard this voice before? What makes the evil’s one so dangerous is that his voice sounds a lot like your own voice—we don’t recognize that it’s him speaking.

We can only stand before God, and stand in the battle, because of Jesus. We stand in His righteousness, not our own. The devil can accuse all he likes—when we come to Christ, we are forgiven, cleansed, and set free. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “*God made [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God.*” God is for us, not against us.

- following the breastplate of righteousness comes the shoes—

¹ Klyne Snodgrass, *NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians*, 342.

feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. Think of a pair of shoes with spikes on the bottom—these kind of shoes allow a soldier to stand in slippery conditions.

Isaiah 52:7 says, “*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news [gospel], who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation*”. The devil is constantly to take your feet out from underneath you; the gospel helps us to stand firm, to stay grounded in the ultimate reality of what God has done—and is doing—through Jesus. Jesus died on the cross to give you life; He invites you into life.

The more we know Jesus, the more alert and ready we are. When we know who Jesus is, we discover who God made us to be. As a result, we won't be deceived (for long) about what is right and good, about what matters and what doesn't, about where to invest our time and money, or about where lasting joy, hope, and love can be found.

- Next, Paul says, “*take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*” The foot soldier's “shield” was used by soldier's to protect their entire body, and when soaked in water, they effectively stood up to flaming arrows. The Roman legion, for nearly 4 centuries, were unbeatable in war because of their shields. Soldiers would get in formation, side by side, shield overlapping shield—though vastly outnumbered, they could stand and advance against their enemies.

My dear people, our faith is not a crutch, it's a shield. When we put our faith in Jesus—in who He is, in what He's done for us—the enemy's arrows are rendered useless. These arrows come in various forms: accusation, failure, difficulty, illness, doubt, despair, the death

of a dream, or loved one. The evil one uses these arrows to cause us to turn from God; **our** faith (**plural**), our collective experience of God's goodness and love, enables us to stand **together** in the time of testing.

- Next, Paul says, “*Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*” Do you know that you are loved by God? Do you have assurance that God has forgiven you, knowing that nothing can separate us from God's love? The assurance of our salvation allows us to persevere in difficulty, because we know that God has won, we know that God has us and will not let go. *Do you know this today?*

And the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, becomes a weapon to counter every lie and accusation. The word of God becomes a weapon against every obstacle, every barrier, every roadblock the devil sets in our path. We stand on the promise that when God speaks, when His word goes forth, it always accomplishes His purposes. God's word can be ridiculed, it can be ignored, it can be censured, it can be burned, but it cannot be stopped. God cannot be stopped, His purposes will not be thwarted.

- And so, Paul invites us to “*be alert*” and to “*pray in the Spirit on all occasions*”. Paul began this text saying, “*be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power;*” he concludes by calling the church to pray.

When we pray, when we invite Jesus to rescue us, to forgive us, to strengthen us, to direct us, we draw upon the resources of heaven. The Holy Spirit knows you, He knows your deepest needs and longings, and He knows the Father's plans for you. When we pray in the Spirit, we open ourselves to His life, to His power, to His

blessing and provision. The devil can push us around when we stand in our own resources, but he cannot stand when we stand in Christ.

Pray: Up on your feet...I want to invite you to stand with me this morning. The enemy is real, he is the father of lies, and he wants to destroy your life. But...Jesus is higher, greater, and stronger; we can stand firm, when we stand in Him. I want to pray for you as I conclude.

The Lord's Supper

My sermon brought us to end of verse 18, let me now take you two verses further. Paul writes, *"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."*

Elsewhere Paul describes the gospel as the power of God for everyone who believes. At the heart of the gospel is the good news that God has not left humanity in their mess. God came to us, taking on our flesh and blood, and Jesus took all of our pain, all of our sin, and guilt, and shame, and brought it with Him to the cross where He was put to death. Three days Jesus laid in a tomb, and on the third day He broke loose from the grave— alive, victorious.

He offers you forgiveness, healing, wholeness, abundance. Why? Because He created you, because He loves you, because He sees your value and worth. This is the gospel.

Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we declare the power of the gospel—Jesus has conquered sin, death, and the devil himself.

Jesus is higher, greater, and stronger, and we belong to Him. Isn't this good news?

*"The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."*

We are going to enact this proclamation by eating and drinking this morning. I want to invite the worship team and our servers to come and take their place.