

## Stand in Jesus

### Ephesians 6:10-24

Last Friday was the two year anniversary of the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in London. A sudden unexpected loss of lives because enough provision had not been made to make safe and protect the lives of the people living in that building. Also in the news this week have been devastating landslides in China killing dozens of people. Again, it's where the infrastructure isn't secure that the most fatal and damaging things happen to human life.

What often gets us are the enemies we can't see coming, and don't want to believe are really there. And we read about equipping ourselves properly for that in Ephesians 6:10-24. We're reading here about spiritual battle. Probably a subject that some Christians overthink, but most Christians under think. Paul finishes his letter to the young Christian churches in the great city of Ephesus and the area around it by telling Christians - this battle is real, and you need to be prepared for it.

And what Paul says - four times in vv.10-14, actually, so he's pretty focused on the idea - is that we need to *stand* in Jesus. It's not that we need to suit up with some armour to march on and take great new strides into new territory in this life in Jesus. It's that we need to put on all of the armour Paul describes just to *stand*. To stay upright, not get knocked down, knocked back, knocked out in this new life. To hold the ground already won.

Before we look at this call to suit up for the spiritual battle, as we're finishing our series on Ephesians today, let me recap for us where we've been. We started the letter by seeing that Paul's talking about a whole new life *in Christ*. Not 'Jesus is my friend' or 'Jesus is in my heart' - but actually, we are living *in Jesus*. He's way bigger than we are, so it's that way round.

And chapters 1-3 taught us our identity as Christians. Who we are in Jesus. Those chapters taught us about what God gives us, summed up in 1:2 as 'grace and peace.' Chapters 1-2 describe the 'grace' of God - the unmerited gift that God gives to us. And it's described as being adopted as God's children, secured by God as His beloved inheritance, doted on, treasured beyond measure, loved and forgiven and welcome and died for and seated at the table with God.

Chapters 2-3 talked about the 'peace' of God won for us at the cross - a vertical peace; a peace between us and the God we were once miles away from, a peace that brings life to us when we were otherwise dead. And a

horizontal peace between one another; where every barrier of human division tumbles when you share adoption in God's family; a new humanity being made out of the old and broken one. Who we are in Jesus is the adopted family of God, united with Him and with one another, forever.

And then in chapters 4-6, Paul's been teaching us to 'become who you are.' He's been teaching practical ways that Christians are to live out in increasing measure the status and identity they have. So chapter 4 taught us a bit about the gifts we're given and what we're to use them for. Then in chapters 4-5 we had much more about the character we're called to grow in, putting off the old and dark life and putting on the new and light one.

And chapters 5-6 have been teaching us about how we do relationships as Christians, especially in the home, and more widely at work and church and other places too, with the principle of mutual submission at the heart of it - imitating Jesus in giving up our rights for the sake of the person next to us.

Now Paul adds to that this final section from 6:10 - 'Finally...' As if to say, 'there's one more last word to have that you *need* to know... 'Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.'

It's easy to write off spiritual evil. Paint a cartoon picture in red with horns in your mind, and of course you can dismiss it as childish nonsense. But the Bible doesn't paint that picture, and it doesn't dismiss it. It draws our attention to this reality.

And it's easy to write off spiritual evil when you come from a Western middle class background where if it's not material, it's fanciful. The most convenient thing for God's enemy to do with such people is let them keep thinking there's no enemy. Then they won't see any attack coming, and they certainly won't prepare for it.

But when I talk to friends who haven't come from a nice stable middle class clean cut background, they don't hesitate to tell me that they've experienced the reality of evil. If you've been through hellish stuff, you know there's a hell at work. And when you talk to people from less arrogant and comfortable nations, where the church is growing massively, they won't hesitate to talk about spiritual battle. They see it all the time.

Let's start by acknowledging that spiritual evil, and spiritual battle, is real. Not even because of all that experiential stuff I've just said, but because God's

Word describes it here, and gives us something to do in response to it. There's a God. And there's an enemy too. God says so. And we listen to Him, right?

There's no use pretending that it's all pretend and sticking our fingers in our ears or head in the sand. We don't obsess over there being an enemy (because it suits him quite well when we get fixated). And we don't ignore that there's an enemy (because that suits him equally well). We just get on with responding to the reality of spiritual battle the way God tells us to in this passage.

Paul both starts and ends the letter to the Ephesians with this emphasis on the bigger spiritual realities that exist. Back in Ephesians 1 we looked at the idea that we're living out our lives on the stage of this world, but there's a much bigger, unseen backstage. And it's the backstage where there's *more* activity, and it's *more* influential to what happens onstage than the movements of the characters everyone can see.

Here in Ephesians 6, Paul tells us what costume to put on because stuff's going to come from the backstage our way. There's a struggle, Paul says in v.12. That's real, that's genuine. It's not with people, whether they're in your workplace, your home, your church, your school... they're *not* the enemy. The enemy is the enemy. And for the battle, we need the armour.

*Do you tend to over-spiritualise or under-spiritualise your life in Jesus? What helps you stay practical? What helps you stay prayerful?*

It's pretty customary at this point to go through each item of armour that Paul describes and explain how it's a metaphor for truth, righteousness, faith, etc. etc. But I'm not going to do that. I don't think you'll hear it, it'll wash over you, because some of you have heard it all before, and it'll just sound like the standard script. Also, this is basically what we've been doing in our Streams services all year, and we've got our last one of those next week, where we'll sum it all up.

Instead, I want to bring out a couple of things that Paul intended these young Christian churches to see in this that we might tend to miss. First of all, this whole suit of armour thing in vv.14-17 is all just saying the same thing that the whole letter is saying, but with another image for it - we need to live our lives *in Jesus*.

You see, Paul's got the book of Isaiah in mind. Isaiah 11 is looking forward to the coming Messiah, the Rescuer of God's people, and v.5 says: 'Righteousness will be his belt, and faithfulness the sash round his waist.'

Isaiah 49 is also looking forward to the Messiah, where v.2 says, 'He made my mouth like a sharpened sword.' In Isaiah 59, God looks around for people to live with justice and uprightness, but nobody does, so vv.16-17 say: '...so His own arm worked salvation for Him, and His own righteousness sustained Him. He put on righteousness as His breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on His head.'

When you see where Paul's drawing his imagery from, you see what he's saying - it's the Messiah, and it's God Himself, who wears this stuff in the battle. And that's who Jesus is, Paul keeps saying - He's both God, and the Rescuer God sends to set us free and bring us infinitely fuller life.

So when Paul says in v.10, '...be strong in the Lord,' he means it. Stand in Jesus. You stand firm in the spiritual battles you experience when you life is squarely, wholly, fully *in Jesus*.

Knowing that helps - it means you're not worrying about whether you've remembered to do all the right things in the right order to protect yourself from every evil scheme of the devil. It's a much, much simpler thing we need than that - it's to express total dependence on Jesus, saying we can't live and love and persevere without Him.

And the thing is, Jesus wins. He already won. Colossians 2:15, which Paul wrote at a similar time to similar churches, says: 'And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.' Jesus wins. Undoubtedly, repeatedly, eternally. So stand in Jesus, in times of attack, and in all the other times where we brace ourselves for them.

Having said all that, the next thing to say is that Paul does twice tell us - in vv. 11 and 13 - to 'put on the *full* armour of God.' When we get to v.16, after we've heard about belts and breastplates and sandals, we read '*in addition*' there's shields and helmets and swords.

We need it all. We can't be sold on the truth of the gospel and confident of being right with God but leave readiness to go wherever God tells us to move on the shelf. We can't wear being safe with God and swing the good news message about and not lift up faith to defend against flaming arrows of doubt,

deceit, temptation, distraction and condemnation. We're called to wear the whole lot.

When a soldier wasn't fully kitted, he was much more vulnerable to being wounded and falling. This is all part of Paul's second half of Ephesians, describing how we are to 'become what we are.' Just as in 4:22-24, when Paul told us to 'put off the new self... and put on the new self,' and expected us to follow all the instructions about honesty, anger, speech, sex, greed and alcohol...

...he expects us to put on the *whole* armour of God - confidence in the truth of the gospel, guarding our hearts with living out the rightness of God we've been given, readiness to go wherever and to whomever God sends us, actively resisting attacks with determined faith in Jesus, knowing we are made safe with God, and always having the good news message in hand and ready to use.

*Where are you vulnerable to attack? Which piece of the armour needs attention?*

Next Sunday, in the last Streams service of the year, we'll look more at v.17's 'sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.' The Greek for 'word' there is *rhema* - it means 'message' rather than 'word' (which would be 'logos' in Greek).

We usually think of this verse as talking about the Bible as the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 uses the word 'logos,' probably referring to the Scriptures in this way: 'For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.'

But what Paul's talking about in Ephesians 4:17 is the 'message of the gospel' - the 'mystery' that he refers to in v.19 and that he talked about back in chapter 3 - not a shrouded-in-cloud who-knows-what-God's-doing thing, but the plan of God revealed and publicly made known - good news that God gave Jesus to this world that whoever would believe in Him, put their lives *in Him*, would find forgiveness, grace, adoption, peace, new identity and eternal life.

Paul's saying that we always need to have that message to hand. It's how we take new ground. This passage is mostly about standing. But Paul's still wrecklessly, fearlessly proclaiming this good news to whoever will listen, even

when he's chained up, as he explains in vv.19-20. If someone asked you, 'what's the good news about Jesus?', what would you say? Would you have that message 'to hand'? Are you ready to draw it out and use it when the moment suddenly comes for that?

All of this is linked to prayer in vv.18-20, and it's prayer that Paul majors on. It's what God calls the Church to major on, and although we're getting there folks, we really are growing here; we're not yet majoring on it. Pray, pray, pray, pray, pray. It's there five times in three verses. I wouldn't be surprised if it wasn't there five times in one week for a lot of Christians.

We're given lots of instructions about prayer. Pray 'in the Spirit' we're told in v.18. When you pray, do you just kind of jump in? Or do you sit a moment, invite God's Spirit to fill you and lead you, and bring to mind what God wants you to pray for? How about if you started your prayers, 'Come, Holy Spirit' and paused, before seeing where He takes you? Some of you are doing this, and it's changing you. I pray we all find the same.

Then we're told to pray with four 'alls.' All occasions. All kinds of prayers. With all perseverance. For all God's people.

Prayer is not to be limited to one morning a week or one slot in a day but for all occasions. It's not just the standard list of things you got used to asking for as a kid but it's all the requests God stirs in your heart. It's not to be dropped when there's no shift in the situation but stubbornly pursued. It's not just for the leadership team or for overseas missionaries or for the Queen and her government or the manse family, but for all God's people.

Well... I do appreciate prayer for the manse family. And for me. I really, really do. And Paul, writing to these churches, teaching them, leading them, tells them that he needs their prayers too. Tom Wright observes about vv. 19-20, 'Paul knows that the prayers even of young and inexperienced Christians are every bit as valid as those of a seasoned apostle... Their prayers for him are as important as his prayers for them.'

Our prayers, together and individually, for one another and for what's going on around us and in our world, are the thing Paul spends most time explaining when he says, 'stand in Jesus and be ready for the spiritual battle.' So wherever you are in your prayer life, keep going and keep growing. In the growth I see in our church's prayer life, we need to keep going and keep growing.

There's a song that Andy loves and introduced me to - it's called Another in the Fire. And I've heard that song over and over, and it keeps getting me at the bridge, where they sing...

I can see the light in the darkness  
As the darkness bows to Him  
I can hear the roar in the heavens  
As the space between wears thin  
I can feel the ground shake beneath us  
As the prison walls cave in

I want to feel the ground shake! Do you? And let me tell you, I'm getting emotional listening to that, because I feel it, I know it's coming. I have sobbed and shaken hearing it, because when I tell you that something's coming, this is it! A movement of the Spirit of God like light shattering darkness, where people are set free from what binds them, where the grave clothes come off, where it feels to us like Heaven is coming closer and you can almost touch it.

In Ephesians 6, Paul threads these three things together - the church in prayer, the bold proclamation of the message of the gospel, and the Holy Spirit. If you read Acts 4:23-31, you'll see the same combination - the church in prayer, the bold proclamation of the message of the gospel, and the Holy Spirit inhabiting all that. And *that's* when the ground shakes.

We need those of you growing in prayer to keep going and teach us too. We need those of you growing in boldly sharing the gospel to keep going and teach us too. And as we do those things together, inviting God, 'Come, Holy Spirit' - I hope you'll see what some of us are beginning to glimpse.

*Prayer - 'Come, Holy Spirit...'*

In vv.23-24, Paul finishes his letter to the Ephesians the same way that he started it. Grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ to all those who live in Jesus. The adoption, the identity, the forgiveness, the life-from-death, the unity, the reconciliation, the being built together as one body, one building, one bride, the growing gifts, the growing character, the spring of new life sprouting up amongst us now...

All of that, *surely*, when you know it, when you experience it, leads you to love Jesus with an undying love. Jesus, who loves you and died for you, and loves you with an undying love. And the best He gets from many in response

is a Sunday morning warm affection. Or a come-and-go, hot-and-cold relationship. When you *know* who you are in Jesus - the grace and peace you've been given - you'll *grow* into that undying love for Him.

Life in Jesus is infinitely fuller. It really is time to discover that. It really is time to share that. To be those people. Praying it, proclaiming it, standing in Jesus through thick and thin. No more sidelines. No more hiding. No more sitting still. It's time to stand - together - in Jesus.