

Sermon - Fifteenth Week After Pentecost - 08/31/2024

Text: Ephesians 6:10-20

### Be Strong in the Lord

When St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he began the letter saying, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." This phrase is known to each of us because of its use immediately prior to sermons when the Pastor offers this blessing and reminder of God's grace, and the peace which God in Christ offers. Those who receive this blessing and peace from God through Christ also receive what Paul states next, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ..." If you truly desire to see what St. Paul's main points are in the book of Ephesians, then reading chapter I of this letter is where you would start. However, you will notice that Paul stated here, that God our Father has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

When you combine these words from the beginning of the letter to the Ephesians with the words from the last chapter of Ephesians, in Ephesians chapter 6 where our reading comes from, then you should be able to draw the conclusion that we are all engaging in something called spiritual warfare. Throughout this whole letter to the Ephesians, Paul has been trying to get you to see that there are two different and opposing ways that people live their everyday lives. The one lives according to the flesh (which he also calls darkness), the other side lives according to the Spirit (which Paul calls light). However, these distinctions are within the greater category of spiritual warfare which is why Paul says in Ephesians 6: 12, "For our struggles are not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world authorities of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." It is not a coincidence that Paul uses the term heavenly places to describe the blessings of Christ in the I st chapter and then uses it again in this final chapter speaking of the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Each of us are tempted by what Paul calls the flaming darts of the evil one. These flaming darts are a weapon that is thrown. So our enemy is close to us and throws flaming darts at us. We know that our enemy is close to us from passages such as Genesis 4:7, "...sin is crouching at the door.. e" and 1 Peter 5:8, "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." However, Ephesians also speaks of a closeness. For Ephesians 6: 1 1 says, "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." That word for scheme there is  $\text{YEOOÖEiOtg}$  which is where our modern word for methodical comes from. So the devil is methodical in the way he attacks each of us. He picks away at us a little bit at a time methodically disassembling our very souls. The devil attacks us with flaming darts and methodically picks us apart like an elite quarterback picking apart a secondary. Satan knows your every weakness and knows the buttons to press to get you to fall into temptation every time.

So the word of Law for you this evening is that you do not resist these temptations . Sometimes you even eagerly and willingly fall for every scheme and method of the devil.

However, more alarming than this is that you resist God in all things that you do. The book of Ephesians talks about two ways of living. On one hand we have the way of flesh, of darkness, of the world, but, on the other hand, we have the way of the Spirit, of light, and of faith as Baptized children of God. The Law is that you so often choose to live like everyone else. You don't pray as often as you should in your own homes. You don't guard yourself or your soul from the attacks of the devil. You don't fill your homes with the words of truth and so you fall for every lie. — Don't live like everyone else! —

You are not like anyone else, and God knows that resisting temptation can be difficult for you. However, He doesn't leave you unprotected. He also knows that you will resist Him when left to your own understanding. However, He urges you by the words of St. Paul, "From now on, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might." This is no throw away verse as if we're really just trying to get to the following verses about the armor. No, this verse is urging you to stop resisting the Lord and let yourself be strengthened in the Lord. That little word "in" is also confusing. How are we to be strong in the Lord? That word "in" is expressing a relationship in which you receive that which the one on the other end has. You receive the full benefits of the Lord. More than this, you also partake of these benefits, the strength of His might.

That word for strength here comes from the word that forms our modern word "aristocrat". Krateo is like being in a kingdom in which the king's rule is unchallenged and His power is supreme. No one else can top it, and when you try to overthrow His power, you will find that He never falters one bit.

I said, we are engaging in spiritual warfare. That is true, but there's no contest of who's going to win. "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm," You are going to be constantly under attack, but the whole armor of God will let you stand like a soldier in the front lines opposing the enemy. The armor of God will be your protection so that even if you have been beaten down, you will stand firm unscathed against the attack. You're on the winning side, and nothing can defeat the dominion and rule of the Lord.

So what is this armor? The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes wrapped in the firm foundation of the Gospel of peace, the shield of faith which extinguishes all the flaming darts of the evil one, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God. Be clothed in this armor. Take it up in your lives through prayer and petition at all times. Persevere in this prayer for all the saints.

Finally, Paul asks those in the full armor of God to pray for him, "that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak." Pray for me as your pastor so that the words which I speak may be God's words, and that I may proclaim the Gospel without being timid, and that I may preach boldly as is right for the preaching of this Gospel. We have a Lord whose kingdom shall not end. His rule and His strength are without equal- The battle is won, the victory is ours- The crogg of Christ defeatg every enemy- It snuffs out every flaming arrow. It takes away the power of death, and even when death tries to beat us down and eventually causes

us to die. You will stand up again on your own two legs defying death by your own resurrection in the Lord Jesus who is raised from the dead already and will raise all those who have received strength in the Lord and received the benefits of His kingdom and His might. Amen.